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An Evaluation of Early Childhood Education Programs: The Parents' Perspective of Quality Care

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AN EVALUATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS:
THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF QUALITY CARE

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

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Doctor of Education

by

Buu Thai

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THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF QUALITY CARE

by

Buu Thai

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS:
THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF QUALITY CARE

by Buu Thai

Early childhood education (ECE) programs play a critical role in the social,

emotional, and cognitive development of children and help to prepare them for

kindergarten. Recognizing the benefits of ECE programs, state and federal governments

have made notable efforts to make these programs more accessible. However, with

various federal, state, and local governments involved in administering and funding ECE

programs, a complex, fragmented, and oftentimes confusing system ensued, making the

ECE landscape very difficult for parents to navigate. Parents are often the primary

decision-makers when selecting educational programs for their children. Studies often

focus on practitioners' or researchers' perspectives on quality care rather than parental

choice. Through a 3-phase approach, the purpose of this study is to better understand the

factors that influence parental decision-making when selecting ECE programs for their 3-

and 4-year- old children in a well-populated urban and suburban area of the United

States. Data collection included a community scan and mapping of ECE programs in

California's Santa Clara County, an analysis of publically available information of ECE

programs, and stakeholder surveys. Findings revealed that there is a disparity in ECE

programs in the southern region of the studied area, family/home-based care had the least

publically available information, and parents' cultural background, education level, and

household income influences the value they place on family engagement and cultural

competency.

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Throughout the last three years, I had to make some adjustments to my work schedule and sometimes take several weeks off at a time. I am grateful to my boss, Leslie Crowell for her flexibility and support. Thank you for trusting me to balance work

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my maternal grandparents:

Ha Thien and Manh Thi Tran

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Chapter 1. The Complexities of the U.S. Early Childhood Education System

In an increasingly global and economically competitive climate, early childhood education plays a vital role in ensuring children have the chance to build foundational skills and enter the school system poised to succeed. Over the past two decades, empirical research has shown time and time again that children who participate in high-quality ECE programs show increased cognitive abilities and socio-emotional competencies (e.g., Barnett, 1995; Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Doggett & Wat, 2006). In fact, quality ECE programming has been shown to reduce grade retention and special education placements, as well as increase high school graduation rates (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Berliner & Glass, 2014). These gains have a greater impact for children from low-income families and those at risk of academic failure who, on average, start kindergarten behind their peers in pre-literacy and language skills (Jacobson-Chernoff, Flanagan, McPhee, & Park, 2007).

Early childhood is a time of significant cognitive and physical growth. Children undergo rapid brain development over the first few years of development, making this period of development a primary focus of support and intervention. Early brain development is like building a house – a strong foundation is needed in the early stages of development (Kaurez, 2007). While exposure to quality ECE can boost language development, mathematical skills, and physical abilities in children (Kaurez, 2007), those who do not have a strong foundation or early exposure to ECE often start kindergarten behind their peers. In reality, 60% of low-income children without quality ECE do not know their alphabet and 94% do not understand number sequencing before entering

kindergarten (Doggett & Wat, 2010). Therefore, getting children off to the right start during the first few years is necessary to optimize their learning potential.

Building on Progress

Recognizing the benefits of ECE programs, state and federal governments have made notable efforts to increase the accessibility of these programs. In 1965, for example, a national ECE movement was launched with the support of three federal initiatives. First, the Federal Office of Child Development launched Project Development Continuity with the goal of supporting preschool children's transition into kindergarten. Unfortunately, the initiative was brief and did not include an evaluation of its effectiveness. Around the same time, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 made block grants available for education institutions to provide educational programs to low-income students. While ECE was not specifically mentioned, Title I block grants provided flexibility for communities to prioritize ECE programs (Cahan, 1989). In 1968, the U.S. Office of Education implemented Head Start/Project Follow Through nationwide, which aimed to serve low-income children from preschool through 3rd grade by connecting them to intervention services (Cahan, 1989). Today, Head Start/Project Follow Through programs continue to exist nationwide. In fact, the culmination of these three federal initiatives gave rise to Head Start and State Preschool systems that we recognize today.

On the state level, California has also committed to increase the number of child care and development programs available to its residents. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and Department of Education (CDE) are the two primary agencies responsible for child care and preschool in California. CDSS's primary responsibilities include licensing child care centers and homes to ensure minimum health

and safety standards for children, conducting criminal record and background checks on child care staff, and administering CalWORK's Stage 1 child care subsidy program established through the state's welfare reform plan, CalWORK. CalWORK has three stages for child care subsidy: Stage 1 child care subsidy is available to CalWORK's participants who work or participate in welfare-to-work activities. Stage 2 child care subsidy is for CalWORK's participants who are receiving cash assistance and those who transitioned off cash assistance for up to two years after their transition. Stage 3 child care subsidy is available to families who have received Stage 1 or Stage 2 for up to two years after they timed out of CalWORK. At each stage, families receive funds to offset the cost of care, and can use them in all eligible ECE programs in their community.

The California Department of Education (CDE) is responsible for providing subsidies and administering various child care and preschool programs (especially for low-income families). CDE administers subsidies for two of the three CALWORKS 'stages' and conducts a variety of planning, technical assistance, quality improvement, and capacity development activities. In addition, CDE coordinates services for parents through local resources and referral programs that assist them with locating, choosing, and enrolling in preschools that accept CALWORKS subsidies. CDE also sets staffing standards (Title V) for all publicly subsidized child development programs (Melnick et al., 2017).

In addition to CDSS and CDE, several state agencies share the responsibility for ECE programming and administration. For example, California's First 5 Commission (along with 58 county-level commissions) was established in 1998 with the passage of Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Act, to provide early childhood development services to all children birth to five years of age (Melnick et al., 2017).

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These state agencies played a critical role in ensuring administrative and financial support to keep ECE programs operational. However, involving various state departments in administering and funding ECE programs creates a complex, fragmented, and often confusing system that is increasingly difficult for parents to navigate.

The complexity of the ECE system then trickles down to the local level, which involves County Offices of Education, school districts, First 5 County Commissions, and provider networks. Furthermore, at the local level, private and family centers are generally independently operated with state oversight but without state-funding, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Early Childhood Education Systems at the Federal, State, and Local Level

Level	Agencies					
	U.S. Department of Health & Human Services				U.S. Department of Education	
Federal	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Bureau	Office of Head Start	Office of Child Care	Health Resources & Services Organization	Office of Special Education Programs	Office of Elementary & Secondary Education
State	CA Dept. of Social Services	CA. Dept. of Development		CA Dept. of Public Health	First 5 California	CA Dept. of Education
Local	County Welfare Dept.	County First 5		County Dept. of Health	County Office of Education	School Districts
Providers	Licensed Centers	Licensed Family Care		Accredited	Head Start	State Preschool

Source: Adapted from California Department of Education, Child Development, 2017
http://cde.ca.gov/sp/cd

Fragmented Policies Create Fragmented Experiences for Parents

While California offers numerous ECE programs for children under age five, the decentralized nature of the ECE support system results in quite a bit of variance in quality across centers (Melnick et al., 2017). In fact, a poll conducted by National Public Radio (NPR), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health examining parents' selection of, and experience with, child care revealed a significant gap between parents' and research experts' assessment of quality—most parents shared a view opposite that of the researchers. Whereas parents rated the quality of their own child's care highly and believed that these centers offer a range of activities to promote their child's development, researchers determined that parents often overestimate quality of care according to established standards and benchmarks (Child Care and Health in America, 2016).

Definition of Quality Care in Early Childhood Education

The definition of 'quality' in early childhood programming varies across program administrators, teachers, researchers, and parents. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), however, defines high-quality preschool according to ten benchmarks, including teachers' education level and child development training, curriculum, class size, nutrition, and health and wellness screening (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009). These benchmarks represent the minimal standards for policymakers, administrators, advocates, and parents to determine educational effectiveness. California's ECE programs are also expected to meet a variety of quality requirements and regulations that follow the Title 5 Head Start Performance Standards, Title 22 Health and Safety standards, and optional program accreditation offered through

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). While the above standards are a good starting point, high-quality ECE programs need to address multiple domains (academic, social-emotional, and physical) that promote children's health and school readiness.

The present study will adopt Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, and Bishop's (2016) key elements of high quality ECE programs that (1) are based on comprehensive early learning standards, (2) address the whole child, (3) follow developmentally appropriate practice, and (4) are effectively implemented. These elements include assessments that consider children's academic, social-emotional, and physical progress; instructional and program planning; teacher preparation to provide engaging interactions and classroom environments that support learning; mentoring and training for teachers; support for English learners and students with special needs; meaningful family engagement; student-teacher ratios; and structural quality and classroom interactions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed method analysis is to better understand the factors that influence parental decision-making when selecting ECE programs for their 3- and 4-year-old children. There is a broad range of literature that highlights what researchers and practitioners value in ECE. However, research focusing on parental choice and values is relatively limited. The data collected in this study will create more opportunities to educate parents as they select ECE programs for their children as well as assist center directors in program operations. In addition, findings may influence future changes to public policies and practices that affect children's access to high-quality ECE

programming and will support efforts to make ECE program information more accessible to parents.

Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of how parents make decisions about ECE programming for their children and to identify specific factors that influence their selection, the following questions will be addressed:

1) What types of licensed early childhood education programs are available to children and families in well-populated urban and suburban areas of the United States?

2) What information about these licensed early childhood education programs is made available to parents?

3) How do parents' views of quality differ by family income, parental education, and cultural background?

4) How can early childhood education providers and administrators disseminate relevant program information to parents so that they can make well-informed, meaningful decisions about their children's care and education?

Significance of the Study

Parents are often the primary decision-makers when selecting educational programs for their 3- and 4-year-old children. Research that explores parents' perception of quality care is critical for the ECE field to further understand factors that influence their selection of ECE programs. While California's K-12 education systems have an established infrastructure to help parents facilitate college readiness and find the right college for their children, an analogous support system does not exist for parents seeking to find the

right ECE center for their children. For example, high school districts provide parents with guides and toolkits on college requirements, finances and scholarships, application processes, and the various types of colleges and universities (private, state, and community colleges) available to support their college bound children. However, parents with preschoolers are left to fend for themselves – comprehensive parent guides on different types of ECE programs, quality ratings of these programs, associated costs and subsidies, and operational hours simply do not exist.

The lack of an established ECE infrastructure is particularly problematic for low-income and immigrant families (Greenberg, Adams, & Michie, 2016). The Urban Institute interviewed experts and stakeholders from early childhood and health and human services agencies in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties and found that low-income families experienced significant barriers when attempting to access social services and ECE programs. Some of the barriers reported include a pervasive fear of interfacing with government agencies, inability to read or translate program materials, and an inability to navigate through eligibility requirements (Greenberg, Adams, & Michie, 2016). Thus, understanding parents' experience during their ECE search and the challenges they encountered will help shine a light on these issues and a call to action for administrators, providers, and policymakers to develop solutions to address the barriers.

Chapter 2. An Evaluation of Early Childhood Education Policy and Landscape

This comprehensive review of the literature on early childhood education programming and practices will first examine the known benefits of ECE. The review will go on to describe the complexity of the ECE systems and policies at the federal, state, and local levels followed by a discussion of existing literature that explores parents' decision-making and their ultimate selection of ECE centers for their children. Finally, the chapter will present the quality care indicators that will serve as the lens for analyzing ECE programs in this study.

Benefits of Early Childhood Education Programs

Empirical research over the last 25 years has demonstrated that children's participation in high-quality ECE programs can have measurable developmental and educational benefits (Barnett, 1995; Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Doggett & Wat, 2006). Quality care can also result in financial benefits for K-12 systems and society as a whole (Krueger, 2002). The following sections review these lines of research in detail so as to highlight the developmental and financial benefits of ECE programming.

Developmental benefits of ECE programs. Children's participation in quality ECE programs increases their cognitive and socio-emotional competencies. For example, studies have shown that scores on measures of general intelligence increase by .50 standard deviations (about 8 points) and by .25 to .40 standard deviations on social emotional assessments following one year of participation in ECE programs (Barnett, 1995; Barnett & Ackerman, 2006). Moreover, ECE participants are more likely to exhibit longer attention spans and self-regulation on problem solving tasks, engage in

complex interactions with their teachers and peers, play cooperatively with others, and use complex sentences to express their emotions (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Quality ECE programs have also been shown to improve school success as children enter elementary school. These benefits continue to manifest in student performance throughout adolescence. Specifically, it has been shown that quality programming can reduce grade retention and special education placements while increasing high school graduation rates (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Berliner & Glass, 2014). For example, researchers found that children who attended the Chicago Child-Parent Center and Expansion Program, which is recognized as a high-quality ECE program, were less likely to be assigned to remedial classes and enjoyed a 7-month advantage in reading and math by 2nd grade, higher academic achievement in 8th grade, and were more likely to complete high school than their peers. In addition, children who participated in this ECE program were more likely to attend college (Reynolds, Maguson, & Ou, 2006).

Return on investment. The evidence of future returns on public investments in high-quality preschool is impressive. For example, a cost-benefit analysis of Chicago Child-Parent Center Program found that for every $1 invested in the program, $7.10 was yielded back to the community (Krueger, 2002). This analysis took into account program costs as well as health and well-being benefits. The authors note that, as these children reach adulthood, future returns will likely include a highly trained and skilled workforce yielding a higher earning potential (Krueger, 2002). At the same time, investment in high-quality preschool reduces costs encumbered by the public educational system and other human services as colleges can then offer fewer remediation courses and fewer adults will have to rely on public assistance/welfare.

Quality ECE programs may also result in many societal benefits including fewer out-of-wedlock births and decreased numbers of youth entering the juvenile justice system (Barnett, 1995). Furthermore, high-quality ECE provides opportunities for parents, especially mothers, to pursue or maintain employment thereby increasing their earning potential by over 6% (Green & Mostafa, 2011). Following these discoveries, Barnett (1995) claimed that "the national cost of failing to provide at least two years of quality [early childhood education] is extremely high, on the order of $100,000 for each child born into poverty or $400 billion for all poor children under five" (p. 45).[1]

In reality, however, ECE funding often comes from many sources including Federal Child Care Development Fund, Child Care Food Program, Federal and State Tax Credits, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWorks, as well as private funders. Each of these funding sources has its own governance structure, policies, and regulations (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009).

ECE Programs and Policies at the Federal, State, and Local Levels

Recognizing the many benefits ignited by ECE programming, federal, state, and local governments have opted to expand these programs. For example, in 1965 the U.S. Department of Education began to track public and private ECE enrollment for 3- and 4-year-olds and found that 27% of these children were enrolled in one or more of these programs. Fast forward 45 years and the ECE enrollment of 3- and 4-year olds has grown to 63% (Cooper & Costa, 2012). This is likely due, at least in part, to general support among policymakers for universal ECE programming. In fact, in 2013 President

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[1] While critics of ECE programs have argued that longer term benefits of ECE programming

Obama advocated for Congress to invest $75 billion over a 10-year span to provide ECE

programs for all children (Berliner & Glass, 2014) and as a result 40 states and the

District of Columbia now have state-funded preschool programs (Kirst & Wirt, 2009).

Federally-funded Head Start. At the federal level, President Lyndon Johnson

established Head Start during the heart of the 1960's civil rights movement. The primary

focus was to expand existing preschool programs to reach disadvantaged children (Hinitz,

2014). From the beginning, Head Start was established to provide comprehensive health,

nutrition, and education services for young children. The program also provided a

vehicle for families to give a voice in programming and curriculum through ample

opportunities for parental involvement and leadership. Each year, more than 900,000

children across the U.S. are enrolled in Head Start programs with the federal government

investing over $6.7 billion to support these programs (Kim, 2013). While Head Start's

philosophy is well-intentioned, research on its level of effectiveness is mixed. At best,

Head Start seems to show some positive effects on cognitive and physical development.

In general, however, early benefits of the program dissipate quickly once children enter

elementary school (Hinitz, 2014; Kim, 2013; Phillips, Gormley, & Anderson, 2016).

State-funded preschools. The California State Preschool program began in 1965,

the same year as Head Start, as a half-day program designed to provide free preschool to

3- and 4-year-olds from low income families. Full-day options were added in 1997. In

2008, Assembly Bill 2759 was enacted to create the California State Preschool Program

(CSPP). CSPP consolidated funding for State Preschool, Prekindergarten and Family

Literacy, and General Child Care center-based programs. The program is now

administered through local educational agencies, colleges, community-action agencies, and private nonprofit agencies.

The CSPP is required to offer comprehensive educational-based activities that are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate (Karoly, Reardon, & Cho, 2007). Other services include meals and snacks for children and referrals to health and social services for families. Similar to Head Start, CSPP programming emphasizes parental involvement and education. Studies have found that participation in CSPP has some effect on children's developmental competence and academic achievement. Reduced grade retention appears to be one of the most notable and celebrated impacts, with cumulative effects that may last well beyond elementary and middle school (Gilliam & Zigler, 2000).

CSPP has been established incrementally over the past 40 years, with approximately 500,000 children enrolled in stated-funded programs each year (Melnick et al., 2017). Families qualify for CSPP programs if their family income is at or below 70% of state median income. In 1998, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Delaine Eastin, established a Universal Preschool Task Force to develop strategies to prepare all children to be ready for kindergarten. In the same year, California voted to support Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Act. This initiative allowed for the formation of California First 5 Commission and 58 county-level commissions to provide early childhood development services to all children birth to 5 years of age (Jacobson, 2009).

In 2001, the School Readiness Initiative, sponsored by First 5 Commission, provided $400 million in state and local funding to prepare kids for preschool and kindergarten. Shortly thereafter, in 2002, California created the Pre-Kindergarten-to-University Master

Plan for Education which, among other things, advocated for universally available preschool. Then, in 2003, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation introduced its Preschool for All initiative to coordinate preschool efforts in the state. In the same year, First 5 Commission allocated $100 million to establish Power of Preschool Demonstration Projects in selected counties (Jacobson, 2009). With the increased support and momentum for ECE programs, California was well on its way to making programming more accessible to all children and universal preschool a reality.

Over the next several years, however, progress leveled-off. While First 5, the Packard Foundation, and several other advocacy groups worked with the California Teachers Association and state legislature to introduce legislation to support high-quality preschool for all children in California, none of the proposed bills made it to the Governor's desk. For example, in 2006, Proposition 82 (Preschool for All) was introduced with funding and support from Rob Reiner and other business groups. The measure was defeated on the June ballot. In fact, it seems the only victory for advocacy groups was Governor Schwarzenegger's signing of Assembly Bill 172 in 2006 to appropriate $55 million for expanded access to preschool in underserved areas. Since 2006, however, there has been little movement to re-introduce universal preschools in California.

Local private and family care centers. Over the course of its political history, California's ECE systems became increasingly fragmented and complex, as policy and funding decisions cascaded down to the local level. At the local level, the complexity is compounded by the existence of local private and family/home-based care centers, in addition to federally-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools. Local private and

family care centers operate independently with licensing oversight from the state and have the added flexibility to adopt different program structures and philosophies. Two of the most common program philosophies are characterized as academically-focused and play-based. Programs that are academically-focused tend to be structured by teacher-led instruction, with curriculum centered primarily on math and literacy skills. Academically-focused programs generally meet high-quality benchmarks based on teacher qualification and curriculum (Cardiff & Stringham, 2006; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Some studies have shown that children enrolled in high-quality academically-based programs may perform better in math and reading, demonstrate increased social competence, and have fewer behavioral problems than their peers who attend play-based programs (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010; Gormley, Gayer, Philips, & Dawson, 2005; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004).

A licensed home- or family-based child care center generally serves a small number of children in a provider's home setting. Families often view family child care as an appealing option due to program flexibility, convenience, and the opportunity to build personal relationships with teachers and staff (Hallam, Bergreen, & Ridgley, 2013). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in Spring 2013, an estimated 946,000 children were enrolled in family child care (licensed or unlicensed). Unfortunately, many studies have found that children who participate in family child care often underperform on assessments of cognitive and language development when compared to children enrolled in other types of center-based care (Doherty, 2015; Phillips & Morse, 2011).

Parents' Choice

Parents are often the primary decision-makers when selecting educational programs for their children. While early childhood education is just one component of a complex set of family management decisions, this particular decision cannot be understood outside the context in which a family lives and works. Understanding parents' process for decision-making, their preferences and priorities for quality care, and their logistical constraints can provide insight on how parents navigate the complexity of ECE systems and ultimately arrive at their selection.

Parental decision-making process. In general, research on parental decision-making processes in early childhood education is relatively underdeveloped. Available literature in this area, however, does address some important aspects of the process, including options for parents to consider, sources parents rely on for information, and the duration of the search process. For example, based on survey and administrative data from families and their license-exempt providers in Illinois, Anderson, Ramburg, and Scott (2005) found that approximately 75% of parents using subsidized care arrangements considered only one option during their last ECE search process. In contrast, Layzer, Goodson, and Brown-Lyon (2007) found that slightly more than half (52%) of low-income parents using home-based care considered more than one childcare arrangement in their most recent search. Importantly, the number of ECE options does not correlate with parental satisfaction of their selection or educational outcomes for their children (Layzer et al, 2007).

Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) concluded that most parents begin their decision-making process following information acquired through informal sources such relatives,

friends, or neighbors. Likewise, Iruka and Carver's (2006) analysis of data from the

2005 National Household Education Survey's Early Childhood Program Participation

Survey found that most parents had learned about their child's provider from a friend. It

seems that few parents seek information from referral agencies (Pungello & Kurtz-

Costes, 1999). These findings indicate that parents most often rely on trusted

relationships as their source of ECE information rather than more formal sources of

information.

   Parents' preferences and priorities. Studies on parental preferences have

distinguished between practical aspects of care (i.e., cost and convenience) and indicators

of quality care (i.e., education or qualification of providers) (Henly & Lyons, 2000;

Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992). These lines of research show that cost, location, and hours

of operation inform parents' preferences as well as constrain their choices, but these

factors do not seem to be their top priority (Brandon, 1999; Davis & Connelly, 2005;

Hoffert, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Lowe

& Weisner, 2004; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001). Instead, parents seem to place

a high value on perceived quality of care when identifying arrangements for early

childhood care and education. However, their definitions of "quality" can vary

dramatically. For example, features of high-quality care valued by parents may include

structural or regulated features (i.e., education, training, and experience of provider,

child-adult ratio) or process-oriented features related to health and safety, the emotional

tone of the setting, quality of the caregiver-child relationships, structured activities to

support children's development, and the parent-provider relationship (Henly & Lyons,

2000; Ispa, Thornburg, & Vente-Barkely; 1998; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Shlay, 2010; Van

Horn, Ramey, Mulvihill & Newell, 2001).

    Constraints on selecting ECE programs. In order to comprehensively understand

parents' ECE selection processes, the contexts in which decisions are made need to be

taken into account. Recent research shows that families' choices may be constrained or

facilitated by various individual and contextual factors. Contextual factors related to

ECE programs include the availability, accessibility, affordability, and parental

awareness of supply (Davis & Connelly, 2005; Sandstrom, Giesen, & Chaudry, 2012).

Davis and Connelly (2005) analyzed how various child, family, and market

characteristics, including availability and cost of center programming, predict the type of

care selected by families in Minnesota. Results showed that families were more likely to

rely on relatives, friends, or neighbors to provide care if and when they were available.

This is especially true when ECE options within a community are limited. A study by the

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

documented unmet ECE needs in low-income communities (NACCRRA, 2006) and

found that availability of ECE sites severely limited families' choices in rural areas.

Additionally, Chaudry et al. (2011) found low-income parents with limited English

proficiency who wanted a provider who spoke their native language had fewer care

options than English-speaking families.

    Parental employment characteristics can also constrain families' access to ECE. For

example, low-income workers experiencing shifting and unpredictable work schedules,

non-standard hours, and inflexible work policies have very limited options (Chaudry et

al., 2011; Henly & Lambert, 2005; Henly & Lyons, 2000). Typically, ECE programs

offer structured operational hours and limited program options (half-day and full-day) for enrollment which may not necessarily meet working parents' needs.

Accessibility of providers also constrains parents' options. In Chaudry et al.'s (2011) study of low-income working families in Providence, Rhode Island and Seattle, Washington, participants revealed a heavy dependence on public transportation to access ECE programs. For these parents, travel beyond their community to seek additional ECE opportunities, even if they were perceived to be of high quality, was unmanageable. Henly and Lyons (2000) also identified concerns about location and accessibility among low-income working mothers in Los Angeles; many of whom traveled long and complicated routes via public transportation to get to workplaces and providers or relied on others for a ride.

The high cost of child care also constrains families' options, particularly for families who do not qualify for assistance or subsidized care and have limited financial resources to invest in high quality care. For example, Davis and Connelly (2005) found families to be more likely to use family/home-based care when the average price of center-based care was relatively high compared to that of family child care. Furthermore, arranging care on a limited budget, and in some cases, in the context of limited supply, may result in the use of multiple care arrangements (Morrisey, 2008; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005).

Parental awareness of child care options, regardless of the supply, also influences decision-making processes. Studies have found that some parents have few sources of information and are unaware of how to search for available options (Sandstrom, Giesen, & Chaudry, 2012; Ward, Oldham LaChance, & Atkins, 2011). For example, immigrants and refugee families seek referral information from their personal contacts and social

networks rather than formal sources (referral agencies, publically available information, schools), which may limit their awareness of available opportunities, including their potential eligibility for federally-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools and child care subsidies (Chaudry et al., 2011; Ward, Oldham LaChance, & Atkins, 2011).

Quality Care Indicators

In 2010, the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee recommended a structure for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that could be voluntarily implemented across the State's 11,000 licensed centers and 36,000 licensed family care homes as an effort to standardize early childhood instructional practices. The rating structure provides five quality elements: ratio and group size; teaching and learning; family involvement; staff education and training; and program leadership. Note, however, that this rating structure does not include the key indicators of care following research on parental decision making (i.e., access and continuity of services, curriculum, teachers and instruction, classroom environment, family engagement, and cultural competency).

Access and continuity of services. Historically, definitions of "access" and ensuing evaluation methods have focused on concepts related to use, availability, and affordability of ECE programs. While there is no single or universal definition of ECE access in the literature, most researchers focus on location or physical surrounding of ECE programs and/or access to ECE programs for low-income families (Friese, Forry, & Tout, 2017). Friese, Forry, and Tout (2017) define access as what is offered when "parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs" (p.5). Note,

however, that these indices do not explicitly consider location and physical surrounding, hours of operation, driving distance or commute for parents.

Curriculum. Early learning standards are defined as expectations for what children should know and should be able to do before entering kindergarten (DeBruin-Parecki & Slutzky, 2016). ECE curricula, on the other hand, set goals for the knowledge and skills that children should acquire in an educational setting, and support educators' plans for providing the day-to-day learning experiences to cultivate those skills, such as daily lesson plans, materials, and other pedagogical tools (Duncan et al., 2015). In general, there are three types of curriculum in early learning: whole-child curricula (play-based), content-specific curricula (academically-focused), and locally-developed curricula.

Whole-child curricula include child-centered learning with a focus on classroom environment (Duncan et al., 2015). Children are encouraged to learn through their interactions with peers in a classroom environment that includes and integrates various learning materials and equipment. While whole-child curricula is consistent with NAEYC's accreditation standards (Zan, 2005), it remains unclear whether it effectively facilitates children's school readiness (Duncan et al., 2015). Content-specific curriculum, on the other hand, is a rigidly sequenced instructional approach that focuses on building academic and socio-emotional skills. Some evaluations have demonstrated that content-specific curricula have positive effects on language, mathematic, and socio-emotional skills (Duncan et al., 2015). Finally, locally-developed curricula are essentially home-grown or grass-roots lesson plans that are developed to meet the needs and vision of a specific ECE center or program. Due to the piece-meal approach in locally-developed curricula, there is no clear evidence for its effectiveness (Duncan et al., 2015).

A cursory review of ECE standards and curricula across programs reveals a patchwork of concepts, knowledge, skills, and abilities that vary considerably from state to state. Thus, children enter kindergarten with various levels of preparation depending on where they live (DeBruin-Parecki & Slutzky, 2016). While K-12 education systems can opt to follow the Common Core State Standards such that all students are exposed to and expected to learn core material, ECE centers often do not adopt universal standards meaning that children are not learning the same basic skills across multiple domains.

Teachers and instruction. Whereas debates about standardizing ECE curricula are ongoing, most researchers agree on basic teacher competencies. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has established standards for teaching and instruction in early childhood. These standards stipulate that ECE teachers must: (1) promote child development and learning by creating learning environments based on a deep understanding of children's needs and development; (2) build relationships with family and community that support and involve them in children's education; (3) systematically employ observation, documentation and assessment to positively influence children's development and learning; and (4) promote learning and development by integrating knowledge of relationships with children and families, a wide array of effective educational approaches, content knowledge in each area of young children's learning, and to the ability to build a meaningful curriculum. Educators who are knowledgeable about early child development and can provide a holistic approach to instruction will then optimize the learning experience for children.

Classroom environment. Quality care is often assessed across two dimensions: structure and process. Structural quality has to do with physical environment and

materials whereas process quality includes the interaction children have with their environment. The quality of a classroom environment and adult-child interactions can impact children's learning. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) is a frequently used measure of early childhood education environments. The 7 subscales focus on areas related to space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff (Cassidy, Hestenes, L., Hegde, Hestenes, S. & Mims, 2005). Positive relationship with teachers and a nurturing classroom environment have been shown to impact the socio-emotional development of children (Stevens, 2017).

Family engagement. Family engagement has also been recognized as a critical dimension of quality in ECE settings. In fact, research has shown that ECE programs that foster strong relationships and partnerships with families are more likely to enhance children's learning and positive developmental outcomes (Bromer & Weaver, 2014; Sheridan et al., 2010). The key components for family engagement include communication with families, opportunities for families to give input to programs, connections to information and resources, program events and activities, and welcoming environments for family to visit and spend time with their children in the classroom (Bromer & Weaver, 2014).

Cultural competency. The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse, particularly with respect to the rapidly growing number of multicultural, multi-lingual children and families. Given this change in demographics, it is important for ECE programs to recognize the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse populations they serve. Literature in the field has noted that, at a minimum, ECE programs should

support home language development, incorporate children's home culture in daily activities, and employ staff who reflect the children and communities they serve (Lopez, Hofer, Bemgarner, & Taylor, 2017). Staff qualifications include fluency in languages other than English, a deep understanding of cultural practices, and proficiency in second language acquisition strategies. Finally, researchers recommend that classrooms, materials, and interactions reflect a value of children's home languages and culture.

Conceptual Model for Parental Decision-Making

The conceptual model for this study was informed by the literature review on parental decision-making and assessments of quality care and education described above. As depicted in Figure 1, it is predicted that three factors (parental educational level, household income, and cultural background) shape the value parents place on quality care and how they reconcile practical factors when selecting ECE programs for their children. Quality care, for this study, includes center and classroom environment, teachers and instruction, curriculum, family engagement, and cultural competency. Practical factors or practical constraints (accessibility, availability, affordability, and awareness) are considered contextual factors that may further limit parent selections of ECE programming.

```
┌─────────────────┐                                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Parental Education │ ──────►                        │ Quality Care         │
│     Level          │         ┌──────────────┐  ──► │ Center & Classroom   │      ┌──────────────┐
└─────────────────┘          │              │       │   Environment        │      │              │
                             │  Parental     │       │ Teachers & Instruction│     │  Parental    │
┌─────────────────┐          │              │       │   Curriculum         │      │  Selection   │
│   Household      │ ──────► │  Decision     │       │ Family Engagement    │      │  of ECE      │
│    Income        │         │              │        │ Cultural Competency  │      │  Program     │
└─────────────────┘          │  Making       │       └──────────────────────┘      │              │
                             │              │  ──►  ┌──────────────────────┐      └──────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐          │              │       │ Practical Factors    │
│    Cultural      │ ──────► └──────────────┘       │   Accessibility      │
│   Background     │                                 │   Availability       │
└─────────────────┘                                 │   Affordability      │
                                                     │   Awareness          │
                                                     └──────────────────────┘
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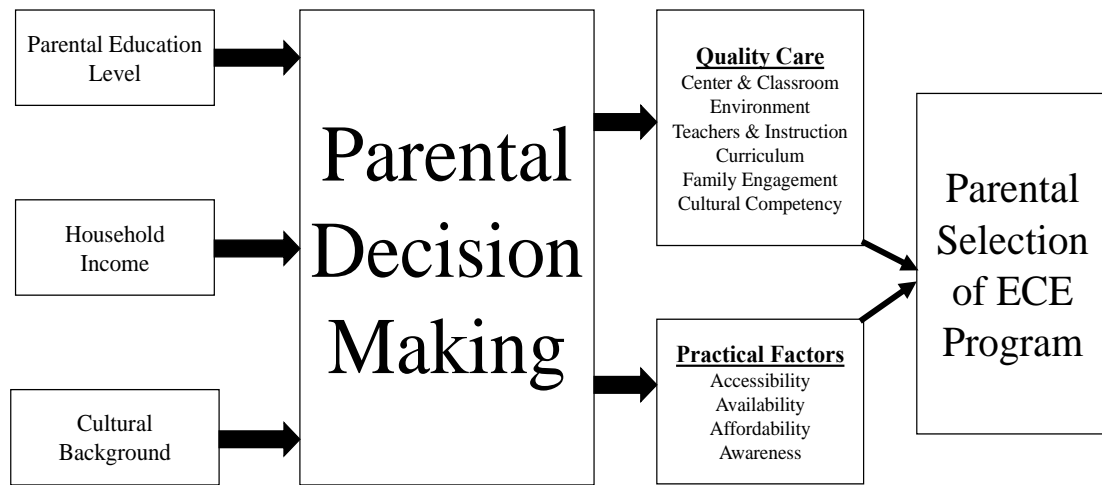
Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model for parental decision-making illustrating factors influencing parent views of quality care.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This study explores parents' perceptions of quality early childhood education programs so as to identify the factors that influence their selection. The study draws upon a conceptual model of parental decision-making as outlined in Chapter 2 to address the following research questions: (1) Which types of licensed early childhood education programs are available to children and families in a well-populated urban and suburban area of the United States? (2) What information about these licensed early childhood education programs is made available to the public? (3) How do parents' views of quality differ by family income, parental education, and cultural background? and (4) How can early childhood education providers and administrators disseminate relevant program information to parents such that they can make well-informed, meaningful decisions about their children's care and education?

A 3-phase approach was implemented to better understand the ECE landscape and parental selection process. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the sample population, California's Santa Clara County, and proceeds to describe the research design. The second section of this chapter presents the data analysis plan and addresses ethical considerations, potential threats to validity, and the researcher's positionality.

Research Context

The County of Santa Clara, often referred as "Silicon Valley", comprises 15 cities, ranging from Palo Alto in the north to Gilroy in the south. The County's population of 1.8 million is one of the largest in the state (following Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange Counties) and is the largest of the nine Bay Area counties. The county is home to

most well-known tech companies in the world such as Apple, Google, and Ebay. The median household income is $102,340 with a poverty rate at 9.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015). While the county is one of the wealthiest in the nation, it has also the largest homeless population (7,600 individuals).

The county represents a highly diverse population. Approximately 38% of the population is foreign born and 53% speak a language other than English at home. The county's racial and ethnic composition is about one-third Asian, Latino, and White/Caucasian.

Children under the age of 5 represent 8% of the overall county's population. In 2015, there were over 50,000 3- and 4-year-olds residing in Santa Clara County, more than half of whom (57%) were enrolled in preschool. As shown in Table 2, the racial/ethnic composition of those children enrolled in preschool is closely aligned with the overall population, with the exception of Latino children (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015). Whereas Latino children account for 36% of the children under 5-years old in Santa Clara County, this subgroup comprises just 24% of the 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool.

Table 2

Racial Composition of Santa Clara County's Children Under 5 in Preschool

Race	Overall Population *(%)*		Children under 5 *(%)*		Children Ages 3-4 in Preschool *(%)*	
All	1,781,642	*(100%)*	149,237	*(8%)*	28,785	*(57%)*
Black	35,633	*(2%)*	2,985	*(2%)*	576	*(2%)*
Asian	570,125	*(32%)*	47,756	*(32%)*	10,938	*(38%)*
Latino	481,043	*(27%)*	53,725	*(36%)*	6,908	*(24%)*
White	623,575	*(35%)*	35,817	*(24%)*	8,348	*(29%)*
Other	71,266	*(4%)*	8,954	*(6%)*	2,015	*(7%)*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015

Research Design

This study employs a mixed method design in order to further understand parents' decision-making when confronted with different types of early childhood education programs. As depicted in Figure 2, the 3-phase approach included a community scan of licensed early childhood education programs in Santa Clara County (Phase I), a summary of publically available information about these ECE programs and an analysis of survey results (Phase II), and the development of a program matrix that integrates program information and survey results into a decision-making tool for parents (Phase III). This 3-phase approach was designed to address the research questions by identifying the number of ECE sites in Santa Clara County, examining the gap in publicly available information of these ECE sites, and determining factors that influence parents' view on quality care and selection.
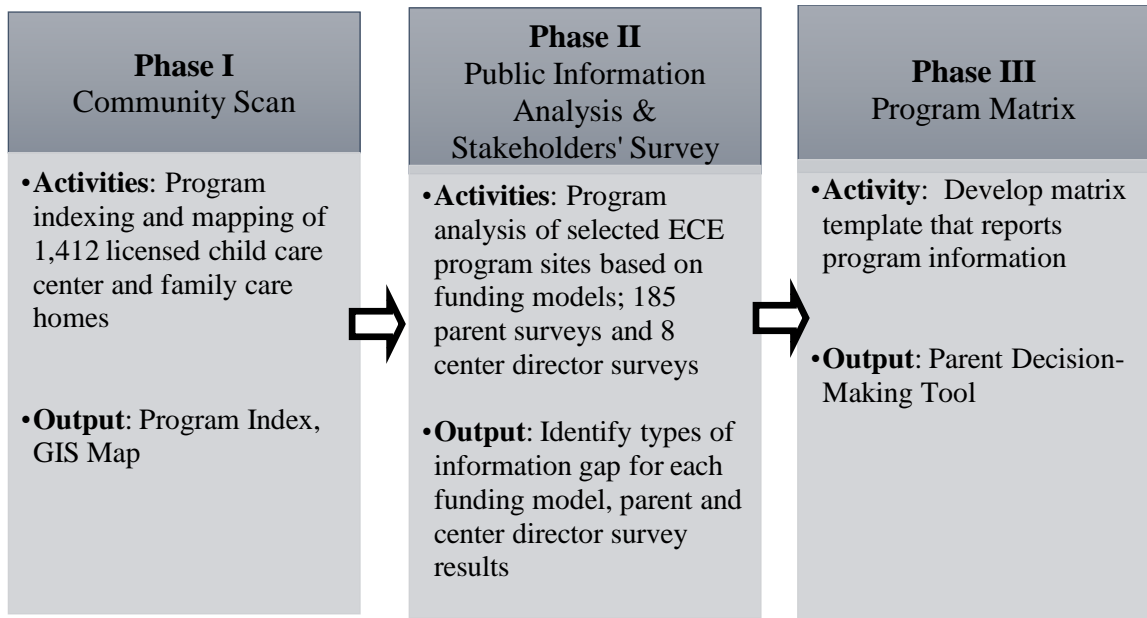
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Phase I Community Scan	**Phase II** Public Information Analysis & Stakeholders' Survey	**Phase III** Program Matrix
•**Activities**: Program indexing and mapping of 1,412 licensed child care center and family care homes •**Output**: Program Index, GIS Map	•**Activities**: Program analysis of selected ECE program sites based on funding models; 185 parent surveys and 8 center director surveys •**Output**: Identify types of information gap for each funding model, parent and center director survey results	•**Activity**: Develop matrix template that reports program information •**Output**: Parent Decision-Making Tool

Figure 2. A 3-phase approach to address the research questions.

Community scan (Phase I). There are currently 590 licensed child care centers and 822 licensed family care homes located in Santa Clara County (California Department of Social Services, 2018). Phase I of this project maps all licensed child care centers according to the location, funding model (federally-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools, or local private/for-profit care) and program structure (center- or home-based). Once all the programs were identified, ArcGIS online, a geographic information system (GIS) tool was used to develop a visual map plotting all the ECE programs throughout Santa Clara County. GIS is often used as a problem-solving and decision-making tool and is especially useful when visualizing geospatial information. The data can then be analyzed to reveal density and relationships among identified variables across a given area.

Analysis of publically available information and stakeholder surveys (Phase II). Phase II of the study builds on the results of Phase I. The first step in Phase II analyzes

publically available information for each funding model (federal-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools, family care, and local private/for-profit care). For each of these sites, the researcher accessed and indexed information about the center's mission and philosophy, hours of operations, age range served, cost/tuition, capacity, teacher-child ratio, and student demographic profile. Once indexed, data were analyzed to identify information gaps. The next step of Phase II was to select eight ECE programs reflecting the four funding models and then survey parents and center directors at these centers to determine how parents' views of quality differ by family income, parental education, and cultural background.

 Program matrix (Phase III). Phase III of this study organizes data collected in Phase I and II into a matrix that indexes program information by funding model, mission, philosophy, hours of operations, age ranges served, cost, capacity, teacher-child ratio, and student demographic profiles. The information was organized in a one-page fact sheet and indexed by funding model (federal-funded Head Start, state-funded preschool, or local private center), program structure (center- or home-based), and philosophy (academic-focused or play-based) to ensure that it is easy for parents to read and use. The program fact sheet can then be organized into an online resource directory that parents can query based on their preferences. In addition, the fact sheet can be developed into a parent resource guide and made available at public libraries or parent resource centers.

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Instruments

 Federal-funded Head Start. There are 17 Head Start sites operated by the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE), two of which were selected for this study.

A total of 138 3- and 4-years old are enrolled in these two sites with nine full-time teachers and seven teacher aides. Seventy-five percent of the teachers have earned a bachelor's degree.

State-funded preschools. There are 27 State Preschool sites operated by SCCOE, two of which were selected for this study. A total of 144 3- and 4-years old are enrolled in these two sites with six full-time teachers and eight teacher aides. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers have earned their bachelor's degree.

Family care. A majority of ECE sites in Santa Clara County are licensed family care centers. There are 822 license family care sites in the county with a capacity to serve up to 14 children each. For this study, one licensed family care was selected to participate. This family care site provided care for infants to preschoolers with two full-time teachers and two teachers' aides. Both teachers (100%) have earned their bachelor's degree in child development or related field. Of the fourteen enrolled at the site, seven children were between 3- and 4-years old.

Local private centers. There are 546 licensed local private ECE centers in the county. For this study, three licensed local private centers were selected to participate. There are a total of 120 3- and 4-years-old enrolled at the three sites with 13 full-time teachers and 70 student teacher's aides. Sixty-three percent of the teachers have earned their bachelor's degree.

Sampling methods. ECE sites were selected via convenience sampling influenced by the researcher's access and proximity to the centers. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to the center director from each of the selected ECE program sites. A one-page information sheet that briefly described the study's objectives and anticipated

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outcomes was provided with the invitation letter. Eight center directors agreed to participate in the study.

Upon approval from center directors, the researcher dropped-off parent surveys for dissemination in the children's cubbies and allowed a period of two weeks for parents to complete and return the surveys. Surveys were distributed to all parents of children currently enrolled in the selected sites. Of these, 185 were completed and returned. As shown in Table 3, the highest parent response rate (78%) came from Head Start.

Table 3

Response Rate of Parents by Funding Model

ECE Model	Total Enrolled	Completed Surveys	Response Rate (%)
Head Start	138	108	78%
State Preschools	144	44	31%
Family Care	14	5	36%
Local Private	120	28	23%

Instruments. The parent survey was developed to measure parents' perspectives on quality early childhood care and education (Appendix C). The surveys ask participants to indicate the level of importance (1 as "not all important" to 4 as "very important") of six broad categories of structure- and process-based features of ECE programming (i.e., access and continuity of services, center and classroom environment, teachers and instruction, curriculum, family engagement, and cultural competency) when choosing ECE programs for their children. The survey additionally inquiries basic demographic information about the children (gender, race, age, and length of enrollment in ECE

program) and parents (race, education level, language spoken at home, and household income). Given the cultural and linguistic diversity of Santa Clara County residents, parent surveys were translated into Spanish and Vietnamese.

The center director survey (Appendix D) asks about center staff, including background demographics, educational level, and language capacity. Similar to the parent surveys, center directors were asked to indicate the level of importance of access and continuity of services, center and classroom environment, teachers and instructions, curriculum, family engagement, and cultural competency when developing programs for their center.

Open-ended questions included in both the parent and center director surveys collected information about the types of public resources parents use to access ECE information, parents' search processes and challenges they may have encountered, as well as (for the center director surveys) promotion and marketing strategies.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data for the study were drawn from a variety of sources and a mixed method approach was used to analyze the data. For the community scan (Phase I), the researcher identified and indexed all the licensed ECE sites in Santa Clara County using an Excel spreadsheet. The program index included center location, program structure, and funding model. ArcGIS online tool was then used to plot the program information onto a Santa Clara County map.

For the public analysis and survey (Phase II), the researcher conducted a comprehensive internet search of publically available information for 17 federal-funded Head Start sites, 27 state-funded preschools, and a random sample of 206 (25%) family

care and 136 (25%) local private centers in the county. For each funding model,

information on the program mission, hours of operations, age range served, cost/tuition,

capacity, teacher-child ratio, and student demographic profile were organized into a

matrix and unavailable information was noted.

Quantitative data from parent and center director survey responses was coded and

analyzed in SPSS to examine the relationship between parental views of quality care and

reported family income, parental education level, and cultural background. Qualitative

data from open-ended questions were coded for common themes.

Finally, for the program matrix (Phase III), the researcher coded parent and center

directors' responses to Question 5 (what suggestions do you have to make information

about the early childhood education programs in your area more accessible to parents?)

and organized these codes according to themes. Responses to this question guided the

creation of a program matrix for parents to use as a decision-making tool.

Ethical Considerations

All data collection procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review

Board. Several steps were implemented to protect participants' privacy and

confidentiality. Personal identifying information was not collected on parent surveys.

Instead, each survey was assigned a participant and site ID code. Participants in the

study were provided a voluntary consent form (Appendices A and B) detailing the

purpose of the study, expected duration of their participation, description of the

confidentiality procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participant rights. Consent

forms were translated in Spanish and Vietnamese. The researcher informed all parents

and directors that their participation was voluntary and refusal to participate or continue would not result in any penalties.

Strengths and Limitations

This study examined only state-licensed ECE programs in Santa Clara County. Unlicensed programs are not mandated to meet the quality standards and/or accreditation requirements which likely results in varied experiences, thereby making it challenging to pinpoint factors that contribute to quality care.

The study employed convenience sampling, which may not be representative of the general population. Convenience sampling may be subject to selection bias due to the accessibility and proximity to the researcher. Thus, generalization of findings from this study should be pursued with caution.

Finally, participant bias may lead parents and center directors to provide what they see as desirable responses on the surveys. To address this concern, the researcher emphasized that answering survey questions is entirely voluntary and that participants may answer some survey questions while choosing to opt-out of participating in the study at any point.

Despite these limitations, this research on parents' view of quality care and their selection of ECE programs promises to inform best practices in the field of early childhood education. In particular, this study may create more opportunities to educate parents on what to consider when selecting high quality ECE programs and assist center directors in program operations. In addition, the findings from this study may influence future changes to public policies and practices that affect the ability of parents to enroll

their children in ECE programs and support efforts to make ECE program information more accessible to parents.

Researcher's Positionality

The researcher has dedicated over 10 years early childhood education advocacy work within Franklin McKinley School District and has served as a trustee on the school board. Over the last two years, the researcher has been engaged in advocacy work with ECE programs across Santa Clara County. The researcher's experience and advocacy efforts may present biases in the development of the instruments and in the analysis of the data. To address these potential biases, the researcher consulted parents, center directors, and education faculty throughout the survey development. In addition, the parent survey was piloted with a small group of parents who had children enrolled in preschool.

Chapter 4. Results

This study explores parents' views of quality in ECE programs, identifies factors that

influence their selection process, and examines their search and selection experiences.

The following chapter will present the findings for each phase of the research design:

community scan (Phase I), analysis of publicly available information and stakeholder

survey responses (Phase II), and the development of a program matrix based on

information gathered (Phase III). Findings from the three phases will help the researcher

to better understand parental decision-making process and whether parents' education

level, household income, and cultural background influence their ECE program selection

as described in the conceptual model in Chapter 2.

Community Scan (Phase I)

In Phase I, the researcher conducted an inventory of ECE programs and mapped the

programs according to the location, funding model (federal-funded Head Start, state-

funded preschools, family care or local private/for-profit care) and program structure

(center- or home-based). A total of 590 licensed child care centers (including 27 state-

funded preschools and 17 federally-funded Head Start sites) and 822 licensed family care

homes were located in Santa Clara County. As shown in Table 4, the majority of the

ECE sites in Santa Clara County were licensed family care/home-based models.

Table 4

Early Childhood Education Centers in Santa Clara County by Funding Model

ECE Funding Model	Number of Sites
Family Care	822
Private Centers	546
State-funded Preschools	27
Federally-funded Head Start	17

Once all the programs were identified, ArcGIS online, a geographic information system (GIS) tool, was used to develop a visual map by plotting all the ECE programs throughout Santa Clara County. GIS is often used as a problem-solving and decision-making tool and is especially useful when visualizing geospatial information. The data can then be analyzed to reveal density and relationships among identified variables across a given area. As displayed in Figure 3, the ECE center data was overlaid onto a heat map representing the population density of children ages 0-5 throughout Santa Clara County. Interestingly, there appears to be a concentration of ECE programs in central and north counties, where the population density of children 0-5 years is ranked among the bottom fifth (less than 5% of 143,042 in Palo Alto, north county). In contrast, there are a limited number of ECE programs located in Morgan Hill and Gilroy (south county) where the population of children 0-5 is between 8-10% of the total population.

Publically Available Information and Stakeholder Survey Results (Phase II)

Phase II of the study builds on the results of Phase I. The first step in Phase II was to conduct an analysis of publically available information for each funding model (federal-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools, family care, and local private/for-profit care). From the community scan, all the federal-funded Head Start (N=17) and state-funded preschools (N=27) were analyzed. However, only a random sample of 25% of the family care (n=206) and local private/for-profit care (n=136) sites were analyzed due to the large number of sites in the county (N=822 and N=546 respectively).
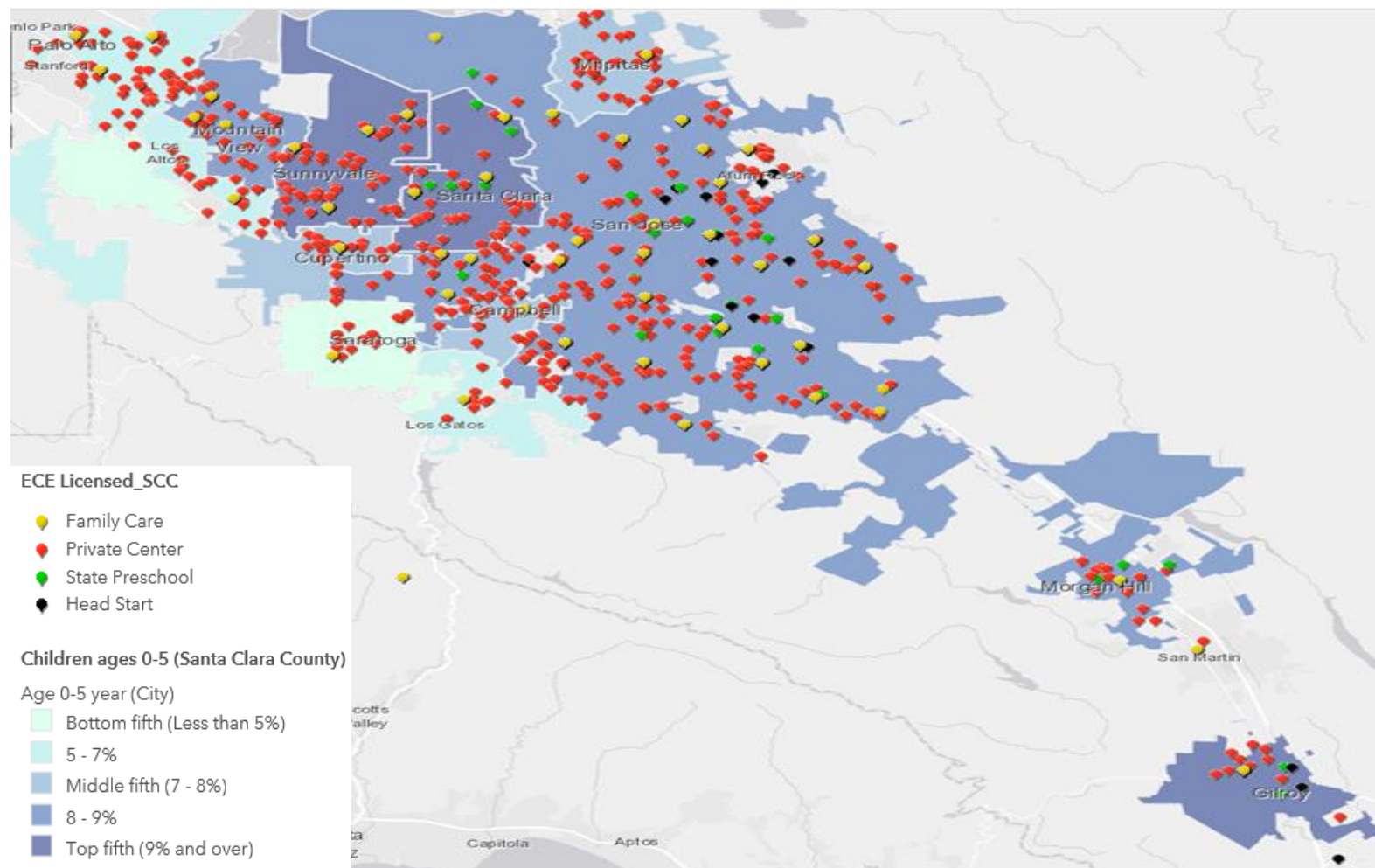
Figure 3. The geographic information system mapping of ECE centers and children 0-5 population in Santa Clara County.

For each of the selected sites, the researcher accessed and indexed publically available information using internet searches for the center's mission and philosophy, hours of operations, age range served, cost/tuition, enrollment capacity, teacher-child ratio, and student demographic profile. The researcher had to search multiple websites in order to gather and compile the needed information. The Results are displayed in Table 5. In general, information for center's mission, philosophy, hours of operations, age range served, cost, capacity, and teacher-child ratio were most accessible for federally-funded Head Start centers and state-funded preschools. Information for student demographic profile was not reported for most of the funding models, with an exception of local private centers where two sites (1%) provided their students' racial and gender composition. Information for family care sites was the most challenging to find. With a sample of 206 family care sites, the researcher was only able to find information on 36 (17%) sites. For these 36 family care sites, information about the centers' mission, philosophy, and capacity was made available on the internet. However, information related to the age range serviced, cost, and teacher-child ratio was not easily accessible (e.g., distributed across multiple websites).

The next step of Phase II was to survey parents and center directors at each of eight ECE program sites (two Head Start centers, two state preschools, and two private or family-based centers) to determine how parents' views of quality differ by family income, parental education, and cultural background.

Table 5

Publically Available Information Analysis by Funding Model

	Mission	Philosophy	Hours	Age Range	Cost / Tuition	Capacity	Teacher-Child Ratio	Student Demographics
Head Start (n=17)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	0%
State Preschool (n=27)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	0%
Family Care (n=206)	17%	17%	15%	13%	7%	17%	0%	0%
Private Centers (n=136)	√	√	√	√	74%	√	19%	1%

Note: (√) indicates that 100% of sites made the information available

Sample. Participants included parents who enrolled their 3- or 4-year old children at one of the eight selected sites. Of the 416 surveys disseminated, 185 parent surveys were returned (44% response rate). Parents at family centers yielded the lowest return rate (n=5) so these have been incorporated with the responses from the local private centers for all subsequent analyses. Most of the parent surveys were completed by mothers 79% (n=146) as shown in Appendix F. Seventy-five percent (n=139) of the children were 4-year olds, as reported by parents. The gender composition was about equal for boys and girls across the three funding models.

The parents' demographic profile is displayed in Table 6. A majority of the parents were Asian/Pacific Islander (48%) followed by Hispanic (37%). When we examined racial background by funding model, Hispanic parents represented the largest proportion in state-funded preschools (68%) while Asian/Pacific Islander comprised the largest proportion of respondents in federally-funded Head Start (66%) and local private (37%)

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centers. Parents' educational level and household income follow similar trends – as educational level increased, household income also increased.

Table 6

Parents' Demographic Profile

	All Sites (n=185)	Head Start (n=108)	State Preschools (n=44)	Private Centers (n=33)
Racial Background				
Caucasian	7%	3%	0%	30%
Asian/Pacific Island	48%	66%	11%	37%
Hispanic	37%	28%	68%	24%
Mixed Race	2%	1%	0%	9%
Not Reported	5%	1%	8%	0%
Home Language				
English	17%	8%	16%	45%
Vietnamese/Chinese	26%	40%	9%	3%
Spanish	23%	15%	57%	6%
Multi-languages	28%	33%	11%	33%
Other	3%	1%	0%	12%
Not Reported	3%	3%	7%	0%
Educational Level				
Less than H.S.	7%	9%	7%	0%
H.S. Diploma/GED	33%	40%	39%	3%
Some College	21%	22%	20%	15%
Associate's Degree	10%	10%	14%	6%
Bachelor's Degree	12%	6%	9%	36%
Graduate Degree	9%	3%	0%	36%
Not Reported	8%	9%	11%	3%
Household Income				
Less than $25,000	37%	46%	36%	6%
$25,000-34,999	20%	25%	18%	6%
$35,000-49,999	10%	7%	18%	6%
$50,000-74,999	8%	7%	11%	3%
$75,000-99,999	4%	2%	0%	15%
$100,000-149,999	1%	1%	0%	12%
$150,000+	8%	0%	0%	46%
Not Reported	12%	11%	20%	6%

Note: H.S. is an abbreviation for high school.

Analysis by individual questions. There were 26 questions in the parent survey, each asking about a specific feature of a typical ECE center or program. For each question, the mean response across participants was calculated to determine the average 'level of importance' that parents place on each feature when considering preschool sites and programming for their children. Overall, most of the respondents rated questions across all six categories (access and continuity of services, center and classroom environment, teachers and instruction, curriculum, family engagement, and cultural competency) as "somewhat important (3)" or higher as seen in Figure 4.

The three criteria with the highest average level of perceived importance were related to curriculum (Q15), teachers and instruction (Q12), and center and classroom environment (Q7). Q15 assessed activities that promote friendship, Q12 assessed teachers' appreciation of children's unique characteristics, and Q7 assessed the welcoming nature of the classroom environment. Similar to these trends in parent responses, features related to teachers and instruction were deemed most important by center directors as well.

The criteria rated as least important were related to cultural competency (Q24, Q 27) and center and classroom environment (Q8). Q24 assessed teachers' ability to communicate with families in their native language, Q27 assessed the diversity of other children at the center, and Q8 assessed the age range of children in the classroom. Center director responses mirror those of the parents with the lowest ratings on criteria related to sharing families' values, communicating in families' native language, and the age range of children in the classroom.
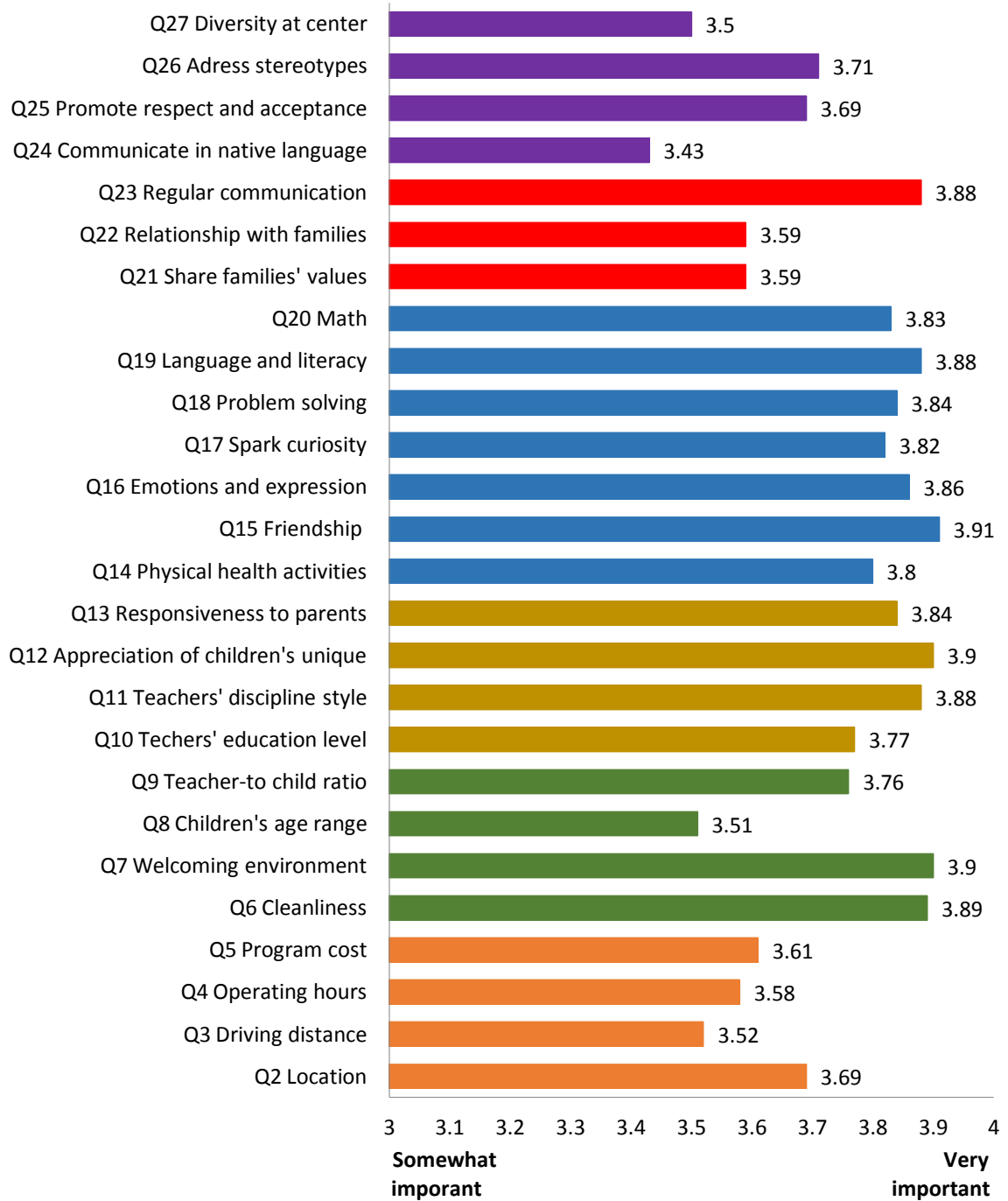
Figure 4. The average responses to the parent survey by individual questions. Note that the x-axis has been truncated to represent the range of responses from 3 ("somewhat important") to 4 ("very important"). The questions are color-coded by category with orange (access and continuity of services), green (center and classroom environment), yellow-brown (teachers and instruction), blue (curriculum), red (family engagement), and purple (cultural competency).

Forced ranked question by priority. The parent survey asked respondents to rank their top three priorities (among the six broader categories) when selecting ECE programs for their children. Respondents' top priorities of quality care seem to be center and classroom environment, and teachers and instruction, see Table 7. Center and classroom environment and teachers and instruction account for nearly all of the criteria ranked among the top three across parent respondents. Similarly, center directors identified teachers and instruction followed by center and classroom environment as their top priorities when developing and implementing programs.

Table 7

Parents' Forced Ranked Question by Priority

Level of Importance	Access & Continuity	Center Environment	Teachers & Instruction	Curriculum	Family Engagement	Cultural Competency	Total
High	14%	23%	23%	17%	11%	11%	463
Med	17%	21%	20%	15%	15%	12%	197
Low	17%	16%	16%	16%	17%	17%	156

Average responses by category. Average responses across questions within each of the six broader categories (access and continuity of services, center and classroom environment, curriculum, teachers and instruction, family engagement, and cultural competency) are consistently at or above 3.5 (between "somewhat" and "very important"). As displayed in Figure 5, the three categories deemed most important include curriculum, teachers and instruction, and center and classroom environment.
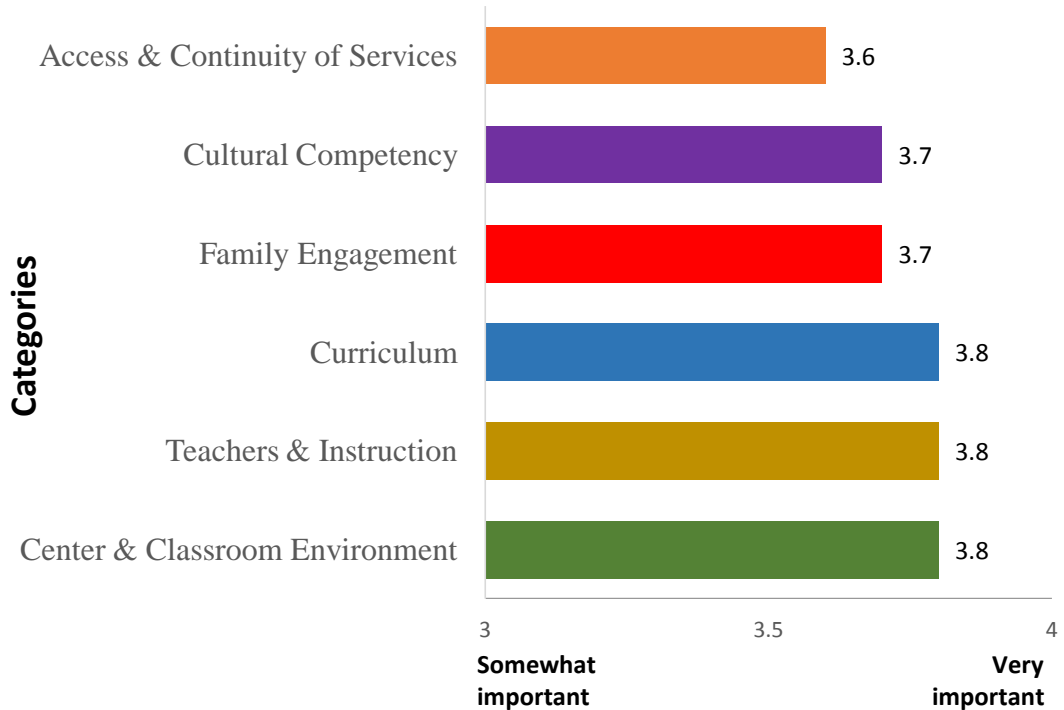
Figure 5. The average responses to the parent survey by category. Note that the x-axis has been truncated to represent the range of responses from 3 ("somewhat important") to 4 ("very important").

Analysis by parent education level. A One-Way ANOVA with parent education as the independent variable (Less than HS, HS Diploma, Some College, Bachelor's Degree, and Graduate Degree) and average response across questions in each category (Access, Environment, Instruction, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Cultural Competency) shows that parent education level influences the value they place on various elements of family engagement, $F(4,165)=4.96$, $p=.001$, and cultural competency, $F(4,165)=5.64$, $p<.001$. As seen in Figure 6, parents with less than a high school diploma place higher level of importance on family engagement and cultural competency compared to parents with a graduate degree. Upon further analysis, we see that this is particularly true of the value that parents place on whether teachers share their family values (Q21, $p=.02$) and

their ability to develop close relationships with families (Q22, p=.004). With regard to cultural competency, parent education level seems to influence the value they place on the teachers' ability to communicate in their native language (Q24, p<.001), teachers' ability to address stereotypes (Q26, p=.008), and the diversity of the children at the center (Q27, p=.04).
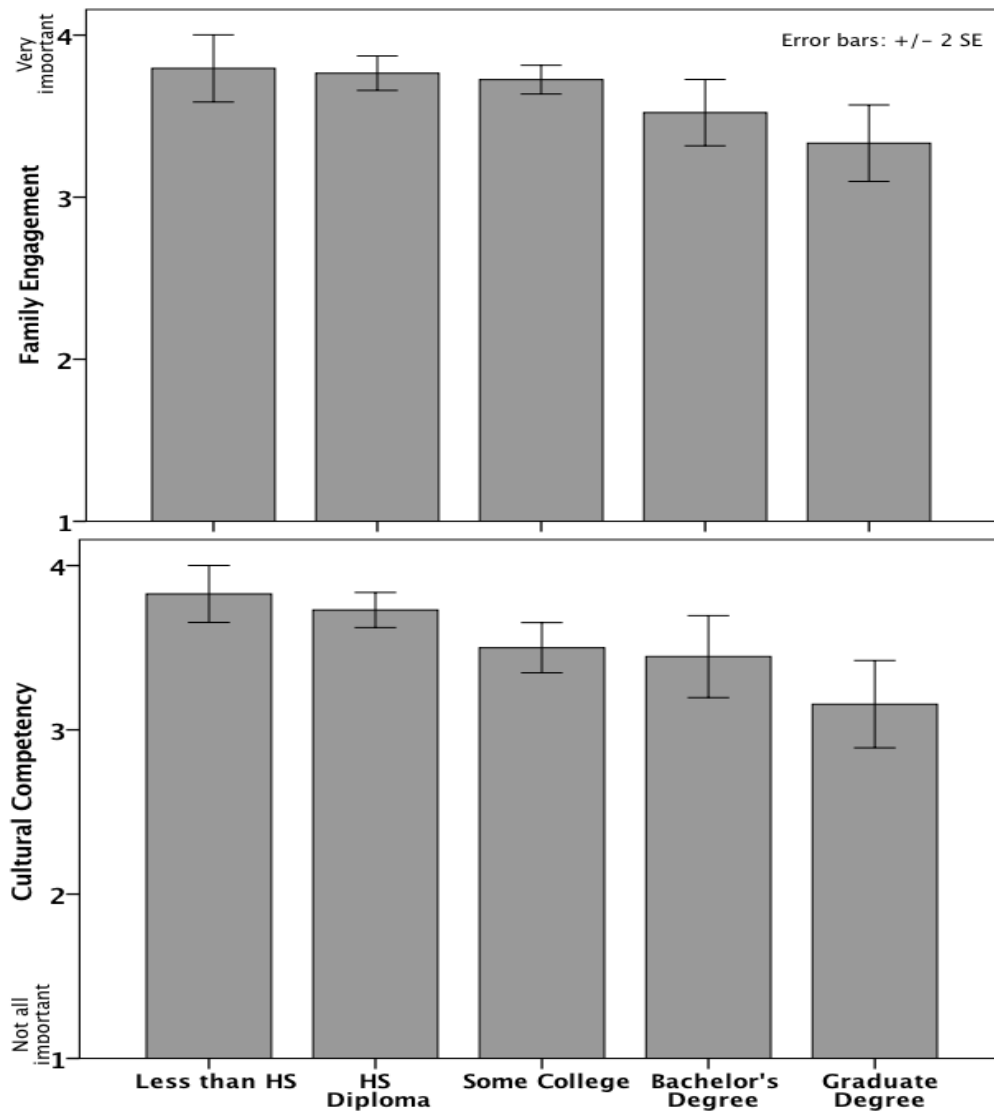
Figure 6. The average responses to questions related to family engagement and cultural competency based on parental education level.

Analysis by household income. A One-Way ANOVA with household income as the independent variable (eight levels ranging from less than $25,000 to $200,000+) and average response across individual questions within each broader category (Access, Environment, Instruction, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Cultural Competency) shows that household income influences the value parents place on various elements of instruction, family engagement, and cultural competency, $F_{(7,155)}=3.45$, $p=.002$, $F_{(7,155)}=5.36$, $p<.001$, $F_{(7,155)}=3.60$, $p=.001$ respectively. As seen in Figure 7, parents with household incomes of $100,000 or higher seem to value instruction, family engagement, and cultural competency less than families with lower incomes. Upon further analysis, we see that this particularly true of the value that parents place on teachers' education level (Q10, $p<.001$) and teachers' disciple style (Q11, $p=.01$). Household income also influences the value parents place on cultural competency as it relates to teachers' ability to communicate with family in their native language (Q24, $p=.001$) and teachers' ability to address stereotypes (Q26, $p<.001$). With regard to family engagement, household income influences the value parents place on whether teachers share their family's values (Q21, $p<.001$), teachers' ability to develop close relationship with families (Q22, $p=.002$), and regular communication to families (Q23, $p=.04$).
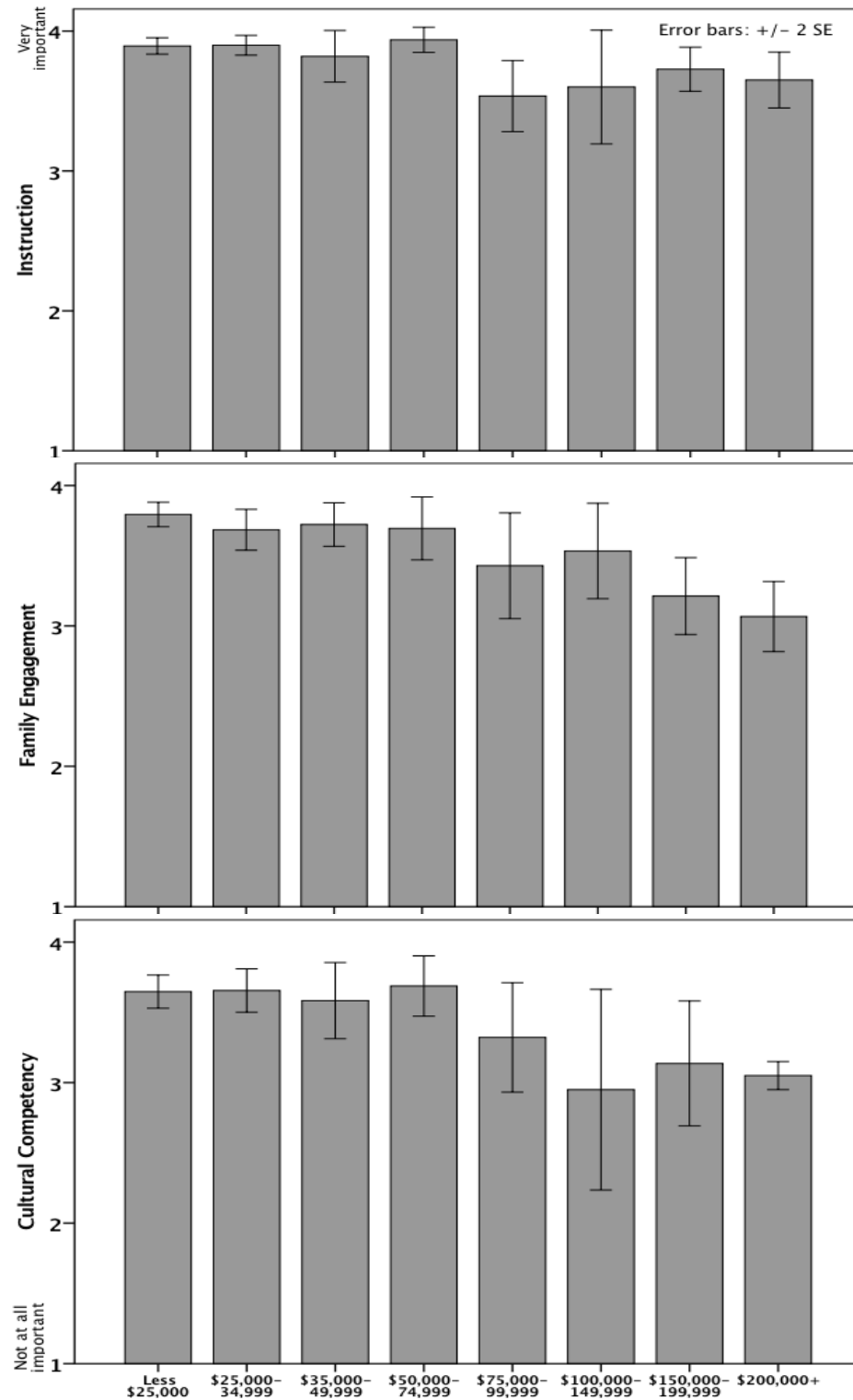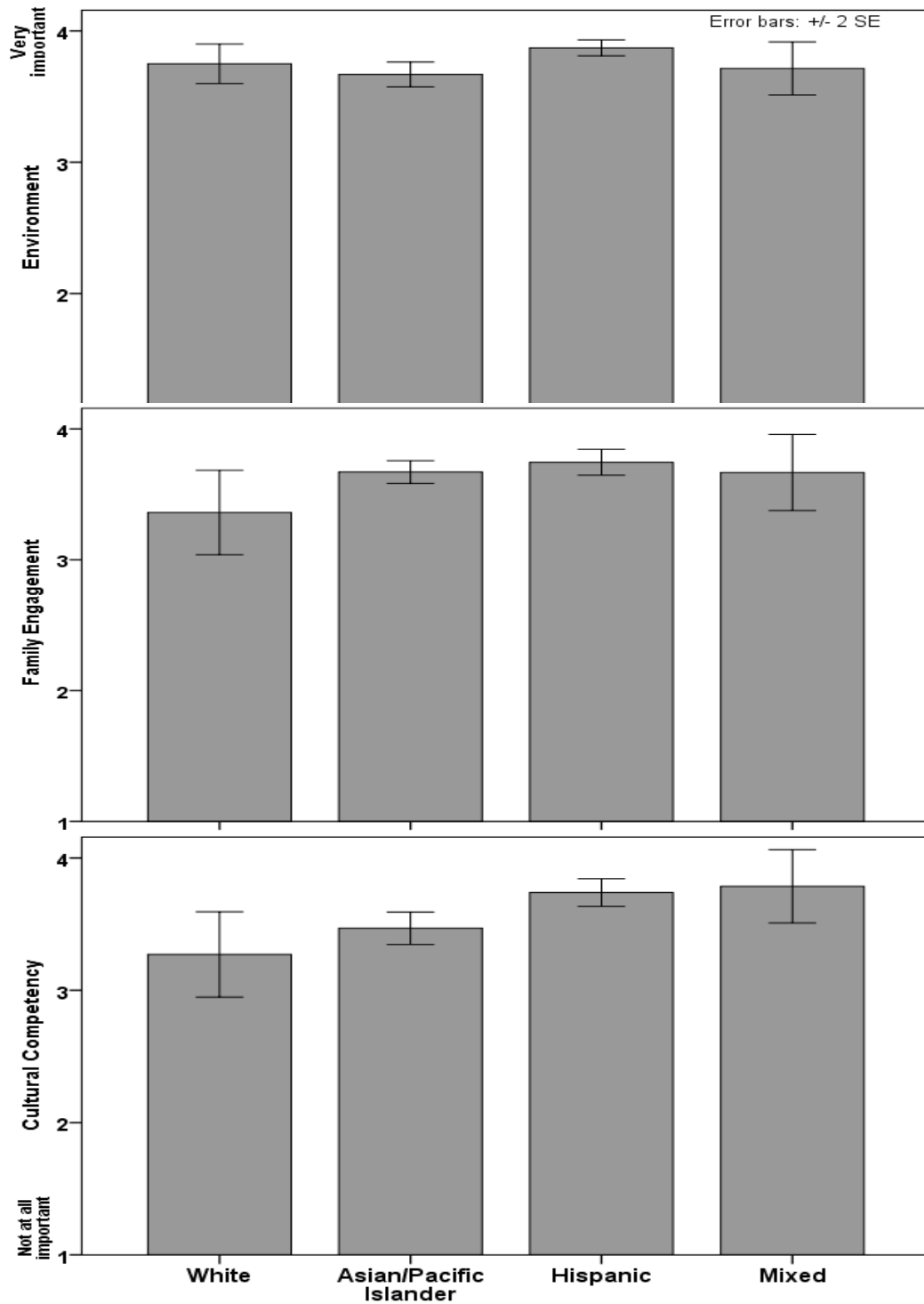
Figure 7. The average responses to questions related to instruction, family engagement, and cultural competency based on household income.

Analysis by racial background. A One-Way ANOVA with parents' racial background as the independent variable (Asian & Pacific Islander, Hispanic, White, and Mixed) and average response across individual questions within each broader category (Access, Environment, Instruction, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Cultural Competency) shows that parents' racial background influences the value they place on various elements of environment, family engagement, and cultural competency, $F(3,172)=3.99$, $p=.01$, $F(3,172)=2.88$, $p=.04$, $F(3,172)=5.25$, $p=.002$, respectively. As seen in Figure 8, Hispanic parents place greater value on environment, family engagement, and cultural competency compared to Asian/Pacific Islander and White parents. Upon further analysis, we see that differences by racial groups are particularly true of the value that parents place on whether classroom environment is welcoming (Q7, $p=.02$) and teacher-to-child ratio (Q9, $p=.03$). Parents' racial background also influences the value parents place on cultural competency as it relates to teachers' ability to communicate with families in their native language (Q24, $p=.01$) and teachers' ability to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity (Q25, $p<.001$). With regard to family engagement, parents' racial background influences the value they place on whether teachers share their families' values (Q21, $p=.04$) and teachers' ability to develop close relationship with families (Q22, $p=.03$).

Figure 8. The average responses to questions related to family engagement and cultural competency based on parents' racial background.

Analysis by home language. A One-Way ANOVA with home language as the independent variable (English, Spanish, Vietnamese/Chinese, and Mixed) and average response across individual questions within each broader category (Access, Environment, Instruction, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Cultural Competency) shows that home language influences the value parents place on various elements of environment, $F(4,174)=2.70$, $p=.03$, and cultural competency, $F(4,174)=5.64$, $p<.001$. As seen in Figure 9, Spanish speaking parents seem to place higher importance on environment and cultural competency compared to Vietnamese/Chinese speaking parents. Upon further analysis, we see that this particularly true of the value that parents place on the age range of in the classroom (Q8, $p=.03$) and the teacher-to-child ratio (Q9, $p=.05$). With regard to cultural competency, home language influences the value parents place on teachers' ability to communicate with families in their native language (Q24, $p<.001$), promote respect and acceptance (Q25, $p=.01$), and address stereotypes (Q26, $p=.03$).
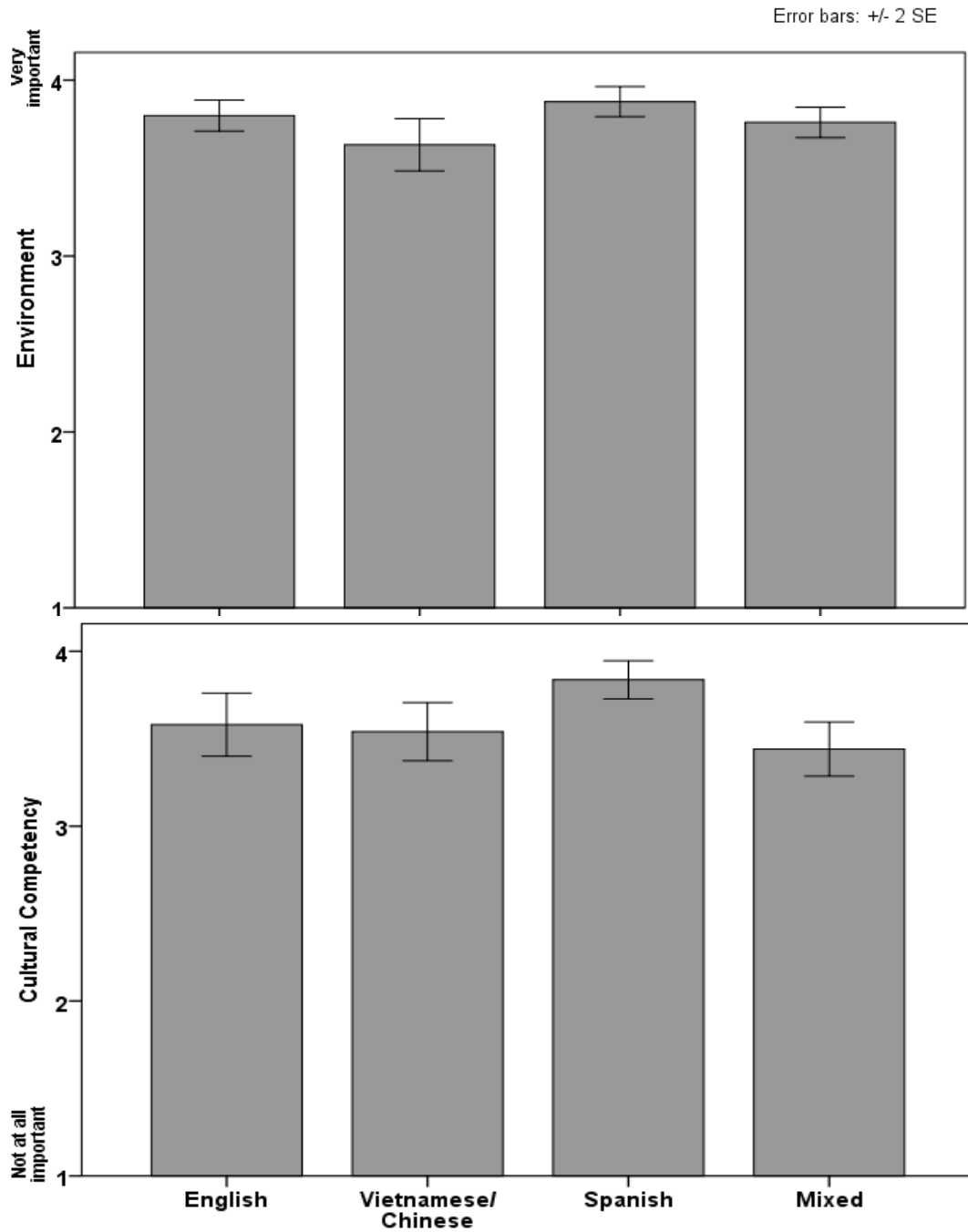
Figure 9. The average responses to questions related to environment and cultural competency based on home language.

Analysis by funding model. A One-Way ANOVA with ECE funding model as the

independent variable (federal-funded Head Start, state-funded preschool, and local

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private centers) and average response across each category (Access, Environment, Instruction, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Cultural Competency) shows that the value parents place on various elements of family engagement and cultural competency varies by ECE center type ($F(2,182)=16.83$, $p<.001$ for family engagement and $F(2,182)=10.89$, $p<.001$ for cultural competency). As seen in Figure 10, parents at local private centers do not view family engagement and cultural competency as important as parents in federal-funded Head Start and state-funded preschools. Upon further analysis, the value parents place on teachers' ability to communicate with family in their native language (Q24, $p<.001$), teachers' ability to address stereotypes (Q26, $p<.001$), and the diversity of other children (Q27, $p=.004$) varies considerably across the center types. With regard to family engagement, the value parents placed on whether teachers share their families' values (Q21, $p<.001$) and teachers' ability to develop close relationship with families (Q22, $p<.001$) varies across ECE centers as well.
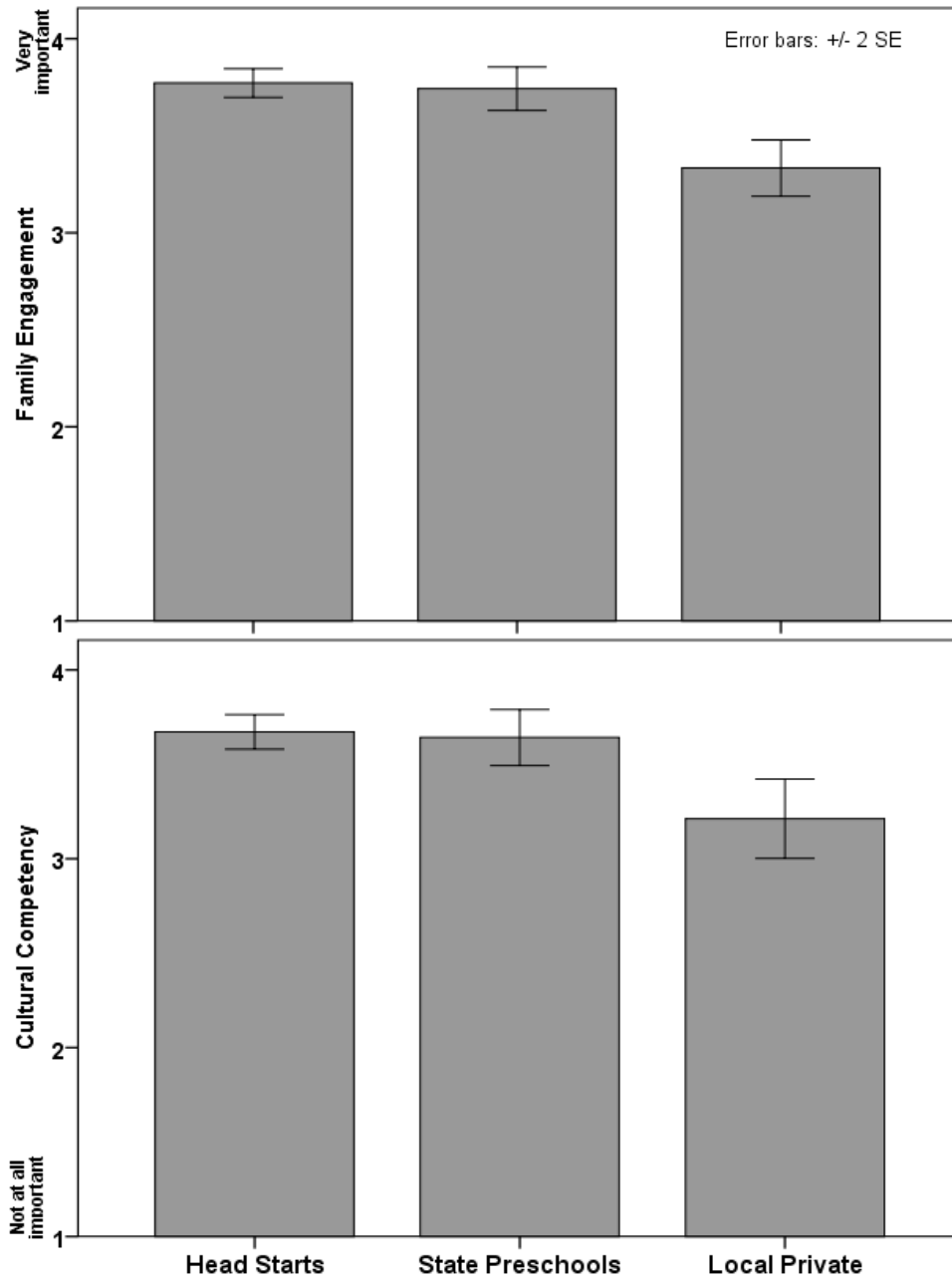
Figure 10. The average responses to questions related to family engagement and cultural competency based on ECE funding models.

Summary of Stakeholder Survey Results

In summary, stakeholders' survey results provide insight into parental perspectives of

quality care and factors that were important to them when choosing an ECE programs for

their children. When analyzing parental responses by individual criteria, forced ranking, and average responses by category, three categories were consistently deemed most important: center and classroom environment, curriculum, and teachers and instruction. However, when analyzing parental responses by educational level, cultural background (racial background and home language), household income, and funding model, we find that the value that parents place on family engagement and cultural competency varies considerably according to their socioeconomic background. As described in the parental decision making conceptual model, findings seem to support the assumption that parents' education level, household income, and cultural background influence the value they place on quality care.

Program Matrix (Phase III)

For Phase III of this study, data collected from the open-ended questions on the parent and center surveys was coded by common themes. In the parent survey, open-ended questions asked about the information sources they relied on to find ECE programs for their children, the length of time it took for parents to find an ECE program, and the challenges parents encountered during their ECE center search. Parents reported that they relied on friends and families as their primary source of information followed by an internet search, see Figure 11.
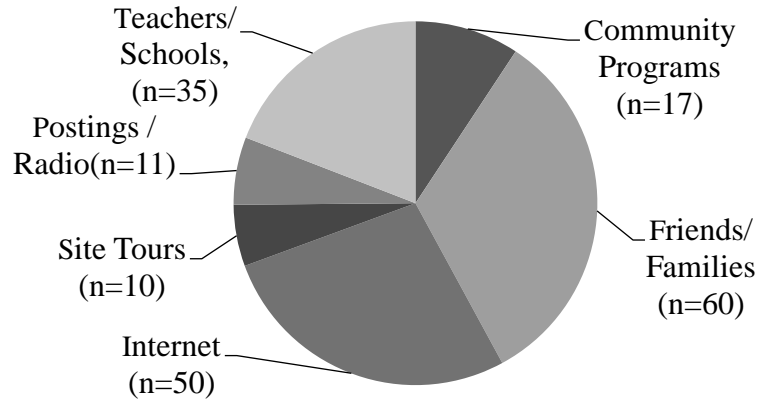
Figure 11. Information sources parents rely on to find ECE programs.

In general, most parents (53%) indicated that it took them between 1 to 3 months to find

an ECE program for their child, see Table 8.

Table 8

Length of Time to Find ECE Programs

Length of Time	Percentage
1-3 months	53%
4-6 months	24%
7-9 months	4%
10-12 months	13%
22+months	7%

Parents reported that delays in finding ECE programs were often due to availability of

space, application and enrollment processes, and a prolonged search for an ECE center

that met their needs (low teacher-child ratio, location, cost, operation hours, and quality

of teachers).

The final question in the parent and center director survey inquired about sources that

would make information sharing more accessible to parents. An interesting suggestion

by parents was to create a centralized web portal that compiled program information into one site for ease of use. In contrast to parents' suggestions, center directors still rely on traditional approaches (open houses, fairs, newsletters) to advertise their program, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Parents' and Center Directors' Source for Information Sharing

Parents' Source of Information	Directors' Sources for Advertisement
Community Programs *(community centers, parent resource centers, churches, doctor's office, clinics, parent workshops)*	Community Programs *(fairs, schools, parent meetings)*
Postings/Flyers/Radio/Brochures	Flyers/Radio/Newsletters
Social Media	Social Media
Teachers/Schools	Open Houses
ECE centralized web portal	Center's website

The findings from Phase I, II and III of this study helped inform the development of a one-page program matrix (Appendix I) that can serve as a prototype for a centralized online portal or resource directory that is searchable by key words and features. In addition, the information in the program matrix can be organized into a parent resource guide and indexed by funding model, program structure, and philosophy. The parent resource guide may then be made available where parents congregate, such as public libraries, parent resource centers, schools, and clinics.

Chapter 5: Parents as Primary Decision-Makers on Quality Care

Studies related to quality care in ECE programs often focus on the effectiveness of different funding models, benefits for children, and/or teachers and instruction. Parental perspective and voice are repeatedly left out of these studies even though they are the primary decision-makers in determining the best type of ECE programs for their children. This study utilized a 3-phase approach to identify the number of ECE sites in Santa Clara County, examine the gap in publically available information of these ECE sites, and determine factors that influenced parents' view on quality care and selection. This final chapter begins with a summary and discussion of the findings reported in Chapter 4. This is then followed by a review of limitations and recommendations for future study. Finally, the chapter closes with recommendations for policy and practice and concluding remarks.

Factors Influencing Parental View on Quality Care

The study was conducted in the County of Santa Clara which has a population of two million residents. This county was chosen for its diverse population, in terms of racial/ethnic backgrounds and economic status. Participants in this study included parents of 3- or 4-year old children enrolled at one of the eight selected sites. Of the 416 surveys disseminated to parents, 185 parent surveys were returned. The following sections provide a summary of the findings in the 3-phase approach.

Disparity in ECE programs in the southern region of Santa Clara County. The community scan of Santa Clara County ECE programs reveals some disparities in access and opportunity for families across the county. While children 0-5 years old comprise 8-10% of the population in the southern region of the county (Morgan Hill and Gilroy),

there are only 38 ECE sites available in this region. In contrast, children 0-5 years old

make up less than 5% of the northern region population (with the cities of Los Altos, Los

Altos Hills, and Palo Alto), yet this region has nearly twice as many sites (67 ECE

centers).

Limited publically available information for family/home-based care. An

analysis of publically available online information for a sampling of ECE sites in Santa

Clara County shows that information about family/home-based care was difficult to

access (distributed across multiple websites) compared to other funding models

(federally-funded Head Start, state-funded preschools, and private centers). The most

challenging information to find on family/home-based care was related to the age range

serviced, cost, and teacher-child ratio in the classroom.

**Parental educational level influences the value they place on family engagement
and cultural competency**. A statistical analysis of average responses to parent survey

questions shows that parental education level influences the level of importance parents

place on family engagement and cultural competency. Parents with no college

experience or with limited high-school seem to place higher importance on teachers'

ability to share their family values and develop close relationships with families. These

parents, in particular, value teachers' ability to communicate in their native language,

address stereotypes, and embrace diversity of the children at the center.

**Household income influences the value parents place on instruction, family
engagement, and cultural competency**. Parent survey results also show that household

income influences the level of importance parents place on instruction, family

engagement, and cultural competency. Parents with household incomes of $100,000 or

more per year seem to value instruction, family, and cultural competency less than

families with lower incomes. Upon further analysis, we see that parents with an annual household income of less than $100,000 per year place higher importance on teachers' education level and their disciple style. In addition, parents with a household income of less than $100,000 per year value family engagement (teachers' ability to develop close relationship and have regular communication with families) and cultural competency (teachers' ability to communicate with family in their native language and ability to address stereotypes) more so than more affluent households.

Parents' racial background influences the value they place on family engagement and cultural competency. This study also shows that parents' racial background influences the level of importance they place on family engagement and cultural competency. Hispanic parents seem to place greater value on the ECE centers' environment, their family engagement and cultural competency compared to Asian/Pacific Islander and White parents. In particular, Hispanic parents place a higher level of importance on teachers' ability to promote respect and acceptance to cultural diversity, a welcoming classroom, and teacher-to-child ratio in the classroom.

Home language influences the value parents place on environment and cultural competency. It seems that the families' home language also influences the level of importance parents place on environment and cultural competency. Spanish speaking parents place higher importance on environment and cultural competency compared to Vietnamese/Chinese speaking parents. Consistent with the analysis of parents' racial background above, we see that Spanish speaking parents value teacher-to-child ratio, teachers' ability to communication with families in their native language, and teachers' ability to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity.

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In sum, these findings show that ECE programs that foster strong relationships and partnerships with families are more likely to enhance children's learning and positive developmental outcomes (Bromer & Weaver, 2014; Sheridan et al., 2010). Children enrolled in these programs tend to have better school attendance, are more social with their peers, and perform better in school. In addition, due to the rapidly growing number multicultural, multi-lingual children and families in the United States, it is imperative that ECE programs recognize the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse populations that they serve. As the results of this study indicate, Hispanic parents want teachers to have the ability to communicate with them in their native language, promote respect and acceptance, and address stereotypes. Specifically, ECE programs should employ staff who reflect the children and community fluent in languages other than English, and have a deep understanding of cultural practices (Lopez, Hofer, Bemgarner, & Taylor, 2017).

Parents relied on friends and families as their primary source of information. When asked about the information sources they consulted when searching for ECE programs for their children, parents reported that they relied on friends and families as their primary source of information. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) which concluded that most parents begin their decision-making process following information acquired through informal sources such relatives, friends, or neighbors. Likewise, Iruka and Carver's (2006) analysis of data from 2005 National Household Education Survey's Early Childhood Program Participation Survey found that most parents had learned about their child's provider from a friend. Together, these findings show that parents access information from their trusted social network. Thus, when disseminating information to parents, the ECE field

needs to strategize how to leverage parents' social network to be the driver for information sharing. For example, one of public health's best practices is to utilize parents to be 'promotores' (promoters) of health information and resources in neighborhoods. Likewise, ECE centers can apply this approach to assist parents in accessing program information and navigating through the complex ECE systems.

Recommendations for Future Study

Findings from the present study may be limited to ECE programs in urban and suburban geographic areas. Based on the results of the community scan, one area of future research should explore the accessibility and availability of ECE programs in the southern region of Santa Clara County. Further study is needed to better understand the underlining cause of the disparity in southern region and determine possible solutions to address this issue.

The second area for future study is to further examine family/home-based care funding model. This study included just a small sample of participants from family care centers such that findings may not be generalizable. Furthermore, because it was challenging to find information about family/home-based care (e.g., center philosophies and program structure), future research is needed to identify and better understand factors that makes this option appealing to families. Family care sites are operated in homes and have a capacity to serve up to 14 children. Unlike private centers, family-care sites most likely do not have adequate staffing to provide administrative support (develop and maintain websites, create marketing materials, etc.).

Another area for future study is to investigate family engagement and cultural competency as it relates to parental education level, household income, and parents'

cultural background. Understanding *how* these factors influence parent views of quality care will help administrators and practitioners to create multi-lingual marketing materials to engage parents, develop curriculum that are inclusive of all children, and provide professional development training to help staff work with multi-cultural families.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

The findings from this study help us to better understand factors that influence parental decision-making when selecting ECE programs for their 3- and 4-year old children. The data collected provide insight to the primary sources parents seek for ECE program information, quality indicators that parents consider to be the most important, and the challenges they face when searching for ECE program information. Shaped by the findings of this study, the following section outlines recommendations for policies and practices to improve children's access to high-quality ECE programming and support efforts to make ECE program information more accessible to parents.

Recommendation 1: Address limited ECE programs in South County. The limited ECE programs in South County, given the population of children 0-5years old, should be a call to action for policymakers in the region. Policymakers in South County need to investigate the cause for the limited ECE programs in their region and to explore opportunities for partnership to expand the Bay Ares' ECE network.

Recommendation 2: Create a centralized ECE web portal. Parents indicated that they faced challenges finding ECE program information via internet searches. They had to browse through multiple websites to locate the information they needed, and each website contained inconsistent information. Some parents suggested creating a centralized ECE web portal where information can be searched according to key words.

A centralized ECE web portal provides the opportunity to access consistent information, allow for relative ease of use, and provide a reliable source that parents can rely on. In addition, similar information should be developed in a form of a parent guide translated in multi-languages and made available at community centers, parent resource centers, churches, doctor's office, clinics, public libraries for parents who do not have access to the internet.

Recommendation 3: Build web presence for family/home-based care. The public information analysis revealed how challenging it may be for parents to search for information on family/home-based care. Compared to other funding models, family care is the most prevalent model in Santa Clara County. However, the availability of information for family/home-based care is limited or may be entirely non-existent. It is therefore difficult for parents to consider all their ECE options. A partnership with Santa Clara County First 5 or Santa Clara County Office of Education, may help to build capacity for family care operators to provide information about their home-based care on the web.

Recommendation 4: Expand and update income eligibility guidelines for subsidy care programs. Parents indicated on the survey that they wanted their child to be in Head Start or state-funded preschool, but their household income was too high to qualify. Head Start's income eligibility for a family size of one is $12,140 annual gross income and for state-funded preschools, the income eligibility for a family size of one is $48,360 annual gross income. These eligibility income thresholds may be too low as they do not appear to take into account the local cost of living. A parent working full-time at minimum wage ($15 per hour), for example, would not quality for the federally-funded

Head Start program. However, they are not making enough money to afford a local private center where the cost can range from $13,000 ($1,083/month) to $29,000 ($2,417/month) annually for full-day care. California therefore needs to re-evaluate income eligibility guidelines for state-funded preschool to reflect the standard cost of living in various regions of the state.

Recommendation 5: Expand Quality Improvement Rating System (QRIS) to include cultural competency. The QRIS rating matrix in California measures three core areas: child development and school readiness, teachers and teaching, and program and environment. Cultural competency, however, has not been included in QRIS. Children in today's classrooms come from multi-cultural, multi-lingual families. We need to build capacity to address the needs of diverse children and providers. Findings from parent surveys recognized that cultural competency is an important factor for some racial groups. Specifically, they want teachers to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity and address stereotypes among children. Therefore, the definition of quality care should be inclusive of all children and families.

Recommendation 6: Encourage collaboration between ECE centers and universities. When inviting ECE centers to participate in this study, the researcher encountered several difficulties in garnering local private center support. Multiple invitation letters and follow up phone calls were provided, without any response. The approval process involved multiple decision-makers. For example, the researcher approached one local private center and provided the center director with an information packet for the study. While she seemed open to supporting the research study, she indicated that she had to contact corporate office for approval. When the request was sent to corporate office, it was denied without any explanation. This similar incident occurred

multiple times during the recruitment of ECE centers to participate in the study. Establishing partnerships between local private centers and universities to facilitate ECE research will open opportunities to learn about programming and practices related to philosophy, populations served, and impact.

Conclusion

President Obama once said that "one of the best investments we can make in a child's life is high-quality early education." In order to make this vision a reality, we must arm parents with the information they need to make an informed decision when selecting ECE programs for their children. Empirical research has clearly demonstrated the impact and benefits high-quality early education has on children's social-emotional and cognitive development. Yet, the complexity of the ECE system makes it challenging for parents to navigate. The results of this study demonstrated parents' desire to have a comprehensive resource directory to access information and guide their decision making in selecting an appropriate ECE program for their child.

In addition, the results of this study reveal that for some subgroups, family engagement and cultural competency are important factors for them, rather than practical factors such as access and continuity of services (driving distance, cost, and hours of operations). It shows that parents' perspectives of quality care are much more complex than theorists and researchers previous thought. Parents are the first teacher in their children's lives and the primary decision-makers when it comes to determining their educational needs. Let's provide parents with the tools and resources they need to select the best ECE program for their child and give their child a chance at a smart start towards their educational future.

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Appendix A Parent's Consent

Early Childhood Education Programs: Parent Survey

Request for Participation in Research

TITLE OF THE STUDY
An Evaluation of Early Childhood Education Programs: Factors Influencing Parental Decision-Making

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER
Buu Thai, Doctoral Student & Dr. Emily Slusser, Faculty Advisor

PURPOSE
The purpose of the study to understand the factors that influence parental selection of early childhood education (ECE) programs for their children.

PROCEDURES
In this voluntary survey, you will be asked about your experiences selecting early childhood education programs for your child(ren). We anticipate the survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. **Please return the completed survey in the drop-off box located in the main office.**

RISKS
Potential risks are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS
While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to participants, the information collected will help us better understand early childhood education programs and assist others in selecting early childhood education programs appropriate for their children.

COMPENSATION
As a small token of appreciation for your time, we will offer a developmentally-appropriate Scholastic book to each participating family. Please complete the book selection form and return the form to the main office. The book will be delivered within two weeks in your child's classroom by his/her teacher.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Survey responses will remain confidential and no personal identifiers will be collected.

PARTICIPANTS RIGHTS: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effects on your relationship with the center or with San Jose State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you decline to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.
- For further information about this study please contact Buu Thai at 408-772-2825 or buu.thai@sjsu.edu.
- Complaints about the research may be directed to Dr. Arnold Danzig, Ph.D., Professor, Educational Leadership & Education Policy, Director of the Ed.D Leadership Program, San Jose State University, 408-924-3722.
- For questions about participant rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research, San Jose State University, 408-924-2479.

RESEARCHER STATEMENT
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

Appendix B Center Director Consent

SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Ed.D. Leadership Program
Connie L. Lurie
College of Education

San José State University
One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0064

408-924-4098
edd-leadership@sjsu.edu

Request for Participation in Research

TITLE OF THE STUDY
An Evaluation of Early Childhood Education Programs: Factors Influencing Parental Decision-Making

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER
Buu Thai, Doctoral Student & Dr. Emily Slusser, Faculty Advisor

PURPOSE
The purpose of the study to understand the factors that influence parental selection of early childhood education (ECE) programs for their children.

PROCEDURES
In this voluntary survey, you will be asked about your experience in developing early childhood education programs and approach in marketing your program in the community. We anticipate the survey will take no longer about 10 minutes to complete.

RISKS
Potential risks are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS
While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to participants, the information collected will help us better understand early childhood education and the information shared will assist parents in selecting early childhood education programs appropriate for their children.

COMPENSATION
A $30 Scholastic Book gift certificate will be offered to participating centers. The gift certificate will be given directly to the center director at the same time as survey dissemination.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Survey responses will remain confidential and no personal identifiers will be collected. Pseudonyms will be used when analyzing and disseminating the results.

PARTICIPANTS RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effects on your relationship with the center/school or with San Jose State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you decline to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.
- For further information about this study please contact Buu Thai at 408-772-2825 or buu.thai@sjsu.edu.
- Complaints about the research may be directed to Dr. Arnold Danzig, Ph.D., Professor, Educational Leadership & Education Policy (Director, ED. D. Leadership Program, San Jose State University, 408-924-3722.
- For questions about participant rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research, San Jose State University, at 408-924-2479.

RESEARCHER STATEMENT
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

Appendix C Parent Survey

1. **How many 3-4-year-old children do you have enrolled at this center?** [   ]

NOTE: If you have more than one 3-4-year-old child in this preschool, please complete the following survey for your <u>youngest child.</u>

How important were the following when choosing an early childhood education program for your child?	Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very Important
Access and Continuity of Services				
2. Location and physical surrounding of the center	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Driving distance or commute to and from the center	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Operating hours of center	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Program cost/tuition	☐	☐	☐	☐
Center and Classroom Environment				
6. Cleanliness of center	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Welcoming classroom environment	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Age range of children in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Teacher-to-child ratio in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers and Instruction				
10. Education level of teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Teachers' style of discipline	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Teachers' appreciation of children's unique, individual characteristics, interests, abilities, and needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Teachers' responsiveness to parents/guardians suggestions and concerns	☐	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum				
14. Activities that promote physical health and movement	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Activities that promote friendship and the ability interact well with others	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Activities that promote an understanding of emotions and expression	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Daily activities to spark curiosity (such as exploring nature)	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. Learning activities to promote problem solving (how things are organized)	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Language and literacy activities (reading, writing, self-expressions)	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. Math activities (counting, number sequence)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Family Engagement				
21. Teachers share my family's values	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. Teachers develop close relationship with families	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. Teachers provide regular communication to parents/guardians about children's progress and experiences	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural Competency				
24. Teachers' ability to communicate in our family's native language	☐	☐	☐	☐
25. Teachers' ability to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. Teachers' ability to address stereotypes among children	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. Diversity of other children at the center	☐	☐	☐	☐

28. In choosing an early childhood education program for your child, what were the top 3 factors you considered in your decision (SELECT your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd priorities)

Program Factors	1st Priority (Select only one)	2nd Priority (Select only one)	3rd Priority (Select only one)
Access and continuity of services	☐	☐	☐
Center and classroom environment	☐	☐	☐
Teachers and instruction	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum	☐	☐	☐
Family engagement	☐	☐	☐
Cultural competency	☐	☐	☐

29. What information sources did you rely on to find early childhood education program for your child?

30. How long did it take you to find an early childhood education program for your child?

31. Did you experience any challenges in your search? If yes, what types of challenges did you encounter?

32. What suggestions do you have to make information about early childhood education programs in your area more accessible to parents?

CHILD INFORMATION

Gender   ☐ Male   ☐ Female   ☐ Questioning   ☐ Decline to Disclose   ☐ Other (specify)_____

Race   ☐ Black or African American   ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native   ☐ Asian

☐ Hispanic   ☐ White   ☐ Decline to disclose

☐ Other (specify): _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)   _____/_____/_____

How long has this child been enrolled in this preschool program?   _____ Years _____ Months

ADULT INFORMATION (The following information will not be shared and will be kept confidential)

Relationship to child	☐ Mother	☐ Father	☐ Guardian
	☐ Grandparent	☐ Aunt or Uncle	☐ Godparent
	☐ Other (specify): _____		
Race	☐ Black or African American	☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native	☐ Asian
	☐ Hispanic	☐ White	☐ Decline to disclose
	☐ Other Race (specify): _____		
Language spoken at home	☐ English ☐ Spanish	☐ Vietnamese ☐ Other (specify):_____	
Highest level of education	☐ Less than high school diploma	☐ High school diploma or GED	☐ Some college
	☐ Associate's Degree	☐ Bachelor's Degree	☐ Master's Degree
	☐ Doctorate or professional degree		
Total household income during the past 12 months (before taxes)?	☐ Less than $25,000	☐ $25,000 to $34,999	☐ $35,000 to $49,999
	☐ $50,000 to $74,999	☐ $75,000 to $99,999	☐ $100,000 to $149,999
	☐ $150,000 to $199,9999	☐ $200,000 or more	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!
Please return the completed survey to the Office.

Appendix D Center Director Survey

Early Childhood Education Programs: Center Director Survey

CENTER INFORMATION

Approximately how many 3-4-year-old children does your center serve?	_____
Approximately how many full-time teachers are employed at the center?	_____
Approximately how many part-time teachers are employed at the center?	_____
Approximately how many teacher's aides or assistant teachers are employed at the center?	_____
Approximately what percentage of your staff hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or related field?	_____ %
Approximately what percentage of your teachers belong in the following racial/ethnic groups?	_____% Black or African American _____% American Indian or Alaskan Native _____% Asian _____% Hispanic _____% White _____% Other Race
Approximately what percentage of the teachers speak the following languages?	_____% English _____% Spanish _____% Vietnamese _____% Other (specify): _____

As you develop and implement your program, to what extent do you consider the following:				
	Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very Important
Access and Continuity of Services				
Location and physical surrounding of the center	☐	☐	☐	☐
Driving distance or commute for parents to and from the center	☐	☐	☐	☐
Operating hours of center	☐	☐	☐	☐
Program cost/tuition	☐	☐	☐	☐
Center and Classroom Environment				
Cleanliness of center	☐	☐	☐	☐
Welcoming classroom environment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Age range of children in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teacher-to-child ratio in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers and Instruction				
Education level of teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers' style of discipline	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers' appreciation of children's unique, individual characteristics, interests, abilities, and needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers' responsiveness to parents/guardians suggestions and concerns	☐	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum				
Activities that promote physical health and movement	☐	☐	☐	☐
Activities that promote friendship and ability interact well with others	☐	☐	☐	☐
Activities that promote an understanding of emotions and expression	☐	☐	☐	☐
Daily activities to spark curiosity (such as exploring nature)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning activities to promote problem solving (how things are organized)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language and literacy activities (reading, writing, self-expressions)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Math activities (counting, number sequence)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Family Engagement				
Teachers share families' values	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers develop close relationship with families	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers provide regular communication to parents/guardians about children's progress and experiences	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural Competency				
Teachers' ability to communicate in families' native language	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers' ability to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers' ability to address stereotypes among children	☐	☐	☐	☐
Diversity of children at the center	☐	☐	☐	☐

What are the top 3 factors you consider when developing programming at your center (choose your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd priorities)

Program Factors	1st Priority	2nd Priority	3rd Priority
Access and continuity of services	☐	☐	☐
Center and classroom environment	☐	☐	☐
Teachers and instruction	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum	☐	☐	☐
Family engagement	☐	☐	☐
Cultural competency	☐	☐	☐

How do you share and advertise information about your center with prospective families?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey

Appendix E Children 0-5 in Santa Clara County by City

City	Bottom Fifth (less than 5%)	5-7%	Middle Fifth (7-8%)	8-9%	Top Fifth (9% and over)
North County					
Los Altos Hills	353				
Saratoga	1,279				
Los Altos		2,033			
Cupertino		4,171			
Palo Alto		4,358			
Mountain View			6,180		
Central County					
Monte Serrano	132				
Los Gatos		1,719			
Campbell			3,100		
Milpitas				5,461	
Santa Clara				10,666	
Sunnyvale				13,249	
San Jose				82,012	
South County					
Morgan Hill				3,376	
Gilroy					4,953

Appendix F Identification and Demographic Profile of Respondents' Children

Variables	All Sites (n=185)	Federal-funded Head Start (n=108)	State-funded Preschools (n=44)	Local Private Centers (n=33)
Identification				
Mother	79%	78%	84%	76%
Father	15%	14%	9%	24%
Other	6%	8%	7%	
Ages of Children				
3YRS	19%	10%	23%	39%
4YRS	75%	86%	66%	61%
Not Reported	5%	5%	11%	
Gender				
Boys	49%	51%	45%	48%
Girls	48%	47%	45%	52%
Not Reported	3%	2%	10%	

Appendix G Sample Fact Sheet of ECE Program

Honey Bee Preschool

(408) 123-5467   www.honeybee.com   123 Beehive Lane, San Jose, CA 95127

Center Director	Ms. Mathilda Brown
Center Director's Email	mathilda.brown@honeybee.com
Program Structure	Center-Based
Funding Model	Local Private
Philosophy	Play-Based
Mission	At Honey Bee Preschool, we believe that children learn through play and experimentation. Our responsibility as educators is to create an environment where children are encouraged to play and to solve problems as they develop their cognitive, motor, and language skills. We offer a great balance between emergent learning and structured activities to engage your child. We nurture them socially, emotionally, and physically to be confident and happy.
Hours of Operation	**Monday to Friday** **Half Day:** 7:30am-12:30pm **Full Day:** 7:30am-6:00pm
Age-ranged Served	2 to 5 years old
Cost/Tuition	**Full-Day (7:30am-6pm)** **Half-Day (7:30am-12:30pm)** 5 days/week: $1,395/month 5 days/week: $1,060/month 3 days/week: $870/month 3 days/week: $665/month **3/4-Day (7:30am-3:30pm)** 5 days/week: $1300/month 3 days/week: $810/month
Enrollment Capacity	50
Teacher-Child Ratio	1:3 for 2s group; 1:4 in 3s groups; 1:8 in preschool
Cultural Competency	Environment reflects different ages, abilities, gender, ethnicities, and non-traditional family roles; invite families to share their cultural heritage through stories and food; classroom materials are multi-cultural, non-traditional, and multi-lingual.
Family Engagement	Parents are the most important influence in a child's development. A strong relationship between parents and program staff is essential to promoting a healthy child develop and positive learning outcomes. We value parents in our program and encourage involvement.
Teachers' Educational Level	All teachers have a bachelor's degree in Child & Adolescent Development.