



MINNEAPOLIS  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
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# Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment

## *Minneapolis Public Schools – Early Childhood Education*



Over 27,000 children under age 5 live in Minneapolis. All are eligible to be served by Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) early childhood programming – Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Early Childhood Screening, and the High Five and Three School preschool programs. To better understand the needs of families with young children and improve services, MPS partnered with Wilder Research in spring 2015 to conduct a community needs assessment. Wilder Research analyzed census and birth record data to describe the families with young children who are living in Minneapolis, conducted 21 interviews with key stakeholders, and conducted 300 surveys from parents. In addition, Wilder conducted seven focus groups with families in communities that were identified as least reached.

### *Young children in Minneapolis face potential risk factors.*

U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that up to half of the young children living in Minneapolis face risk factors that could mean they may not be ready for kindergarten by the time they are old enough to go to school.

#### Children under age 6 in Minneapolis . . .



**40%** are living in SINGLE PARENT households



**46%** live in households with incomes at or below 185% of POVERTY



**44%** are born to UNMARRIED mothers



**30%** lack exposure to EARLY LEARNING experiences (preschool or child care)



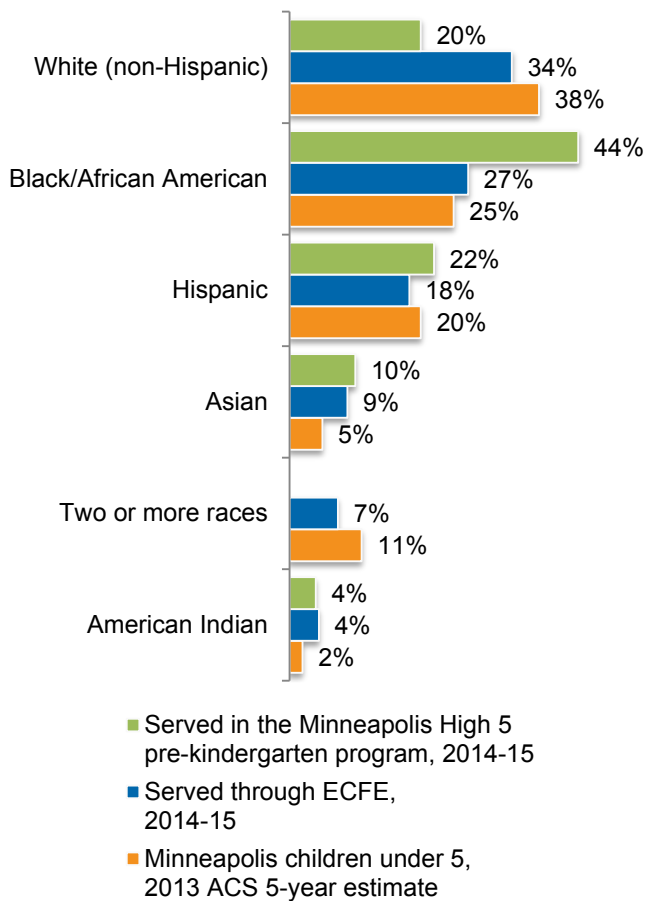
**24%** are HIGHLY MOBILE (children ages 1 through 4 who have moved in the last year)

**400** are born to TEEN MOTHERS each year (average)

2009-2013 Five-year American Community Survey, 2010 Hennepin County SHAPE Survey, 2009-2013 Birth Records data from Minnesota Department of Health Center for Health Statistics. Data used in this report are not consistently available for the same age range, thus some data is on children under age 5 and other data is on children under age 6. Each data point is labeled.

***Communities of color are being reached through MPS early childhood programs, but there are not enough spots, and there are concerns that programs may not be culturally sensitive.***

Minneapolis’ youngest children are primarily white (non-Hispanic), black, or Hispanic. The race/ethnicity of those served through Minneapolis ECFE is similar, whereas the High Five pre-kindergarten program is serving a higher proportion of children of color than reside in Minneapolis. Interviewed stakeholders acknowledged the high quality ECFE and pre-kindergarten programs available through MPS, but noted that the lack of capacity and February registration deadlines mean not all children who could benefit are served.



In addition, immigrant parents had concerns about MPS programming being sensitive to their culture and whether teachers were hesitant to engage children who look different from them or do not speak English as their primary language.

***Despite the many, varied programs and services for young children and their parents, many parents lack awareness of available resources.***

Though parents across all focus groups identified over 20 places that provide resources and programming for young children and their parents, lack of awareness of activities was a main barrier cited by both stakeholders and parents. In addition, on the survey, parents indicated the top two reasons they did not participate in Early Childhood Screening were: 1) they thought (incorrectly) that their child was not old enough; or 2) they did not know about it. Parents also said friends and family, health care professionals, and digital media were their main sources for obtaining information about early childhood and parenting resources. Mailed materials, a primary communication strategy of MPS, is not only expensive, but also may not be reaching many Minneapolis parents with young children.

***Scheduling conflicts and perceived lack of transportation prevent parents from participating in programming for young children.***

On the survey, parents most frequently said scheduling was the reason they did not participate in ECFE, particularly for working parents. Weekends (Saturday mornings, especially), or evenings were noted as the preferred times for programming.

Stakeholders and parents in the focus groups indicated lack of transportation is a main barrier to participation in activities and programs for young children and their parents. MPS offers transportation (via buses or cabs) for families for which

transportation is a barrier. However, feedback from parents and stakeholders indicate a lack of awareness of this service. In addition, families may be challenged to get to other non-MPS programming via public transit.

*"I hear a lot about transportation as being a barrier, especially if you have a large family, it's a big deal to all get on a bus and go to where the services are being held." (stakeholder)*

*"The program should not be just for two hours in the middle of the day when parents are working full time jobs." (parent)*

## Recommendations

Wilder Research offers the following recommendations for MPS Early Childhood Education to consider as it moves forward in serving children under 5 and their families.

- Expand advertising and messaging to ensure parents are aware of programming and its benefits and purposes, as well as available transportation.
- Offer a variety of educational opportunities, including the traditional weekly ECFE classes, as well as shorter formats, or short series that take place on weekends or evenings.
- Continue to reach out to immigrant populations by building upon current efforts to hire diverse staff and partner with community-based organizations and immigrant groups.
- Co-locate programs where parents live or spend time, such as libraries, cultural centers, places of worship, or residents' homes, to break down barriers.
- Expand capacity through partnerships by cross-referring families to other organizations and ensuring child-serving organizations are referring families to MPS.

## Background & Methods

In spring 2015, Minneapolis Public Schools Early Childhood Education (MPS ECE) partnered with Wilder Research to conduct a community needs assessment of Minneapolis families with young children who are not yet in kindergarten. The main goals of the study were to:

1. Identify new and underserved populations, including describing demographic information of who lives in the community and who is being served by MPS ECE programming.
2. Identify child and family risk factors, particularly those that impact children's learning and development.
3. Assess family and parenting education needs in the community.
4. Describe what resources are available to children and families in Minneapolis, and barriers to accessing those services.
5. Identify areas for improvement and recommendations for better meeting the needs of young children and their families.

### *Research methods*

#### **Secondary data analysis**

Wilder analyzed secondary data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009-2013 5-year American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Decennial Census, the 2010 Hennepin County SHAPE Survey, and Minnesota Department of Health birth records from 2009-2013 on indicators that describe the population, and risk and protective factors.

#### **Interviews with community partners**

MPS ECE staff identified 25 community partner agencies, as well as key contact people, and Wilder conducted 21 key informant interviews with community partners from 20 separate agencies.

## Survey of parents

Wilder developed a two-page survey of parents that was administered to a convenience sample. MPS ECE staff handed out the surveys to young families coming to MPS facilities as well as at community partner sites. A total of 393 surveys were collected from May to September 2015; 91 were excluded due to ineligibility—either the respondent lives outside of Minneapolis or does not have children age 5 or younger.

Though the responses are not representative of all community members, just those that had access to the survey via community events and partners, the race and ethnicity breakdown of respondents does mirror that of Minneapolis' population under age 5, though respondents do over-represent southeast Minneapolis (Zone 2).

## Parent focus groups

Wilder Research held seven parent focus groups in October and November 2015. Wilder partnered with community-based organizations to host focus groups and provided funding to each organization to cover their costs for providing space, child care, refreshments, and transportation, as well as \$25 incentives (either Target gift cards or cash) to each parent to compensate them for the time. A total of 73 parents or caregivers participated. Almost all parents (89-90%) represented communities of color, and were living in south Minneapolis, as these communities were identified through the interviews with the community stakeholders as needing more outreach.

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## Acknowledgements

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Common Bond  
Community Initiatives for Children  
Family Partnership  
Father Project  
Fraser  
Harvest Network of Schools  
Hennepin County Medical Center  
Help Us Grow (HUG)  
Hennepin County Library  
Hennepin County Maternal and Child Health  
Indian Health Board of Minneapolis, Inc.  
Jesse Kao Lee & Associates  
La Creche Early Childhood Center  
Little Earth of United Tribes  
Minneapolis Children's Hospital WIC Program  
Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency  
Northside Achievement Zone  
People Serving People  
Project for Pride in Living  
Minneapolis Public Schools - Early Childhood Screening  
Southside Family Nurturing Center  
St. Anne's Place  
Tayo Daycare  
Think Small  
Tubman Shelter  
Tuttle Elementary School  
Waite House – Pillsbury United Communities  
Waite Park Community Council  
Washburn Center for Children  
Way to Grow  
We Love Kids  
West Bank Community Coalition  
YWCA Child Care Centers

And finally, thank you to the parents who completed parent surveys and participated in the focus groups.

## For more information

For more information about this report, contact Jennifer Valrose at Wilder Research, 651-280-2654.

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