

PRESCHOOL FOR ALL

Translating Equity-Driven Policy into Practice

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary _____ | 1 |
| Introduction _____ | 5 |
| Methodology _____ | 9 |
| Key Findings _____ | 10 |
| Parent Perspectives _____ | 10 |
| Provider Perspectives _____ | 15 |
| Recommendations _____ | 20 |
| Appendix A: Parent and Provider Focus Group Questions _____ | 23 |
| Appendix B: Community Engagement Framework _____ | 24 |
| Appendix C: All Born In/Northwest Down Syndrome Association Focus Group Report _____ | 25 |



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amidst concurrent crises including a global pandemic, raging wildfires across Oregon, and a nationwide reckoning demanding an end to centuries of racial injustice, nearly 200 parents and child care providers came together to re-imagine what a racially-, culturally-, and linguistically-affirming system of delivering preschool might look like. These parents and providers represented the rich racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Oregon. Their perspectives, knowledge, and recommendations represent the resilience of these communities and the commitment to ensuring that every 3- and 4-year old child has access to high-quality preschool as a foundation for lifelong success.

This report was commissioned by Multnomah County and intends to inform the details of how a new county-wide preschool program, known as Preschool for All, is implemented on the ground. The findings, based on 24 focus groups and interviews, builds on two years of work led by Multnomah County Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson and a broad coalition of culturally specific organizations, labor partners, and other community-based organizations. Their work developed a ballot measure for the November 2020 election which asked voters to fund the proposed Preschool for All program. The measure passed overwhelmingly. This report outlines findings and recommendations to inform how the policy intent of the preschool program can translate into practice - with thoughtful, intentional design to ensure that the program meets the needs of the diverse children, parents, and preschool providers.

Findings from Parent Focus Groups, Interviews, & Surveys

Quality Preschool Characteristics

- Parents universally want to trust that their child will be cared for in a loving, caring preschool environment.
- Parents want preschool programs to be racially-, linguistically-, and culturally-affirming in staff composition and curriculum.
- A strengths-based and inclusive environment is desired, especially for children with disabilities.
- Parents would like preschool providers to proactively communicate with them, showing an interest to learn about the family and child strengths, culture, language, unique aspects, etc. This builds trust with the preschool teachers.
- Working parents want in-home and other small care providers to have appropriate staffing with backups for sick days.

Exclusion & Bias

- Preschool exclusion (via suspension and expulsion) is a common issue among parents of color and parents with children experiencing learning delays and disabilities. Parents are often surprised by preschool or child care provider requests to not send their child back to school. To prevent exclusion, parents want providers to have the resources and support they need to



keep children in the classroom. In addition, parents want to receive proactive, immediate communication from providers when behavior challenges arise. This communication is critical to building trust that their child is in a high-quality environment.

- Parents with children who experience learning delays or disabilities want the least restrictive and most inclusive environment for their child.
- Parents want to be viewed as partners working with the provider to find solutions that keep children in safe classrooms and meet the preschool provider's needs.

Location & Services

- Parents would like to have wrap-around services co-located or nearby their child's preschool. The most common services requested includes translation services, emergency financial assistance, mental health services, and therapeutic supports.
- Most parents rely on public transit or their own car for transportation to and from preschool.

Child Care Career Development

- Many parents are interested in becoming child care providers or preschool providers. To create and sustain this as a career for themselves, these parents would like access to training and classes, scholarships for needed classes/courses, child care during the trainings, business support to launch a business, and assurance of a living wage.

Findings from Early Care and Education Provider Focus Group and Interviews

Professional Learning

- Most providers rely on personal and professional networks to connect to people with similar experiences. These networks are valuable when they allow for sharing ideas for working with children and supporting their business operations.
- Providers noted that it is essential that professional support is in the language that they understand best, which is often not English.
- Most providers want more business training and support to help with their operations. This includes help understanding how to manage employees, understanding profitability, contracts, facilities, etc.
- In-home care providers want acknowledgement that their business is also their home and want training and support that appreciates the strengths of that intimate setting.

Participation in Public Programs

- Providers view most major publicly funded programs for child care and/or preschool as very difficult to work with or access. Some common barriers to access include: lack of predictable income from month-to-month; significant amount of paperwork and "red tape;" and little support to meet the many requirements.



- In some cases, the confusing nature of these programs mean that providers are put into situations where they are providing care that is not reimbursed by the public programs (i.e. providing free care).
- Experiences with these programs have sowed skepticism in government programs.

Expansion

- Many providers would like to expand to serve more children, but they are challenged both by the amount of up-front cost involved and navigating the real estate market.

Preventing Exclusion

- Providers across the board express a deep commitment to providing care for the children they serve, often under conditions of working with complex requirements of public programs and during long days with little access to coaching and professional support.
- Providers also expressed an interest to keep children in the classroom without expulsion/suspension. To realize this vision, providers want and need sufficient resources and supports including individualized staffing for children who need the most support. Providers would like additional coaching, staffing, and other support to ensure that children are kept in preschool classrooms. This could include therapists, mental health professionals, and other providers to coach them on what they can do to address behavior issues on-site.
- Some providers are concerned that they may lose their State license to operate if they feel like they do not address a child's behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Preschool for All should encourage and support clear and simple intake processes in the native language of the parents.** This process should give providers an opportunity to learn about a child and family prior to the first day of preschool, and give parents the opportunity to learn about the approach of the preschool and meet the teachers. Specific components of this intake process could include simple ways that the teachers can communicate language skills of the teachers and staff; cultural, racial/ethnic representation of the teachers and staff; and understanding what will be taught and how. This intake process should also include sharing expectations and protocols for communicating when behavior concerns arise - including which specific behaviors will trigger same-day parent notification.
2. **The Preschool for All data infrastructure and process for qualifying providers should collect information regarding a) racial/ethnic background of preschool staff and languages they speak; b) hours of care (including before and aftercare options); c) programs' ability and willingness to serve children with learning delays and disabilities; d) whether the program expects children to be potty-trained, e) distance relative to public transit lines, and f) whether additional wrap-around services are located at or near the preschool** (including mental health care and clothing and food support). This information should be available to families and community-based organizations that serve families in accessible ways so that parents can easily find programs that meet their unique needs.



3. **The physical location of new or expanded preschool sites should be on or near public transit in areas of the County that have a high proportion of families in priority population of Preschool for All.** Wrap-around service offerings could include ensuring that providers can connect parents to a pool of emergency funds to assist families they serve with rent and utilities.
4. **To realize Preschool for All's vision for ensuring no suspensions or expulsions occur in preschool settings, all participating preschool programs should have access to professional support, coaching, and resources for appropriate staffing in preschool programs.** In general, one-off training opportunities will not be enough to create the conditions where children are in safe and inclusive environments. Instead, providers should have access to structured networking opportunities where they have a chance to share with each other their own expertise, learn best practices for creating the least restrictive environments possible so that children are not separated from their peers unnecessarily, and connect about shared challenges and opportunities. In addition, the County should consider providing weighted funding for programs that serve children with learning delays or disabilities to encourage and support appropriate staffing for individualized attention.
5. **Culturally specific organizations and organizations that work with priority populations in culturally and linguistically responsive ways should be funded partners to support recruitment and initial training for parents that want to become preschool providers.**
6. **Professional development provided through Preschool for All should prioritize relationship-based, on-going support that honors and appreciates the intimacy that is often involved in caring with young children.** This should include investing in existing and new culturally specific child care and preschool provider networks that build a system of relevant support.
7. **Support for Preschool for All providers should be available in multiple languages, and be provided in evening and weekend options.** These opportunities should be broadcast through existing formal networks, labor unions, and other informal networks through social media. The content of this support must include coaching and training for teaching young children, as well as business and operations training and guidance.
8. **Professional support and coaching for in-home providers should be individualized to attend to the intimate, unique nature of these settings.** This could include assigning one point of contact for coaching and professional support and recognizing that an in-home provider's family is often integrated into the program.
9. **Preschool for All should invest in the capacity of mental health service providers, therapists, and coaches to support preschool providers as well as the parents they serve, and ensure that preschool providers know how to access these supports.** Services and coaching provided to families or providers will better serve children if they are coordinated across home and school environments. Providers and parents want to be on the same page around how best to support their children.
10. **Because the families who will be prioritized by Preschool for All face a multitude of structural barriers to accessing other public services, holistic wrap-around supports should be provided to the priority families.** This includes considering how other public resources can be leveraged in systematic ways to minimize the bureaucratic hurdles that families face.



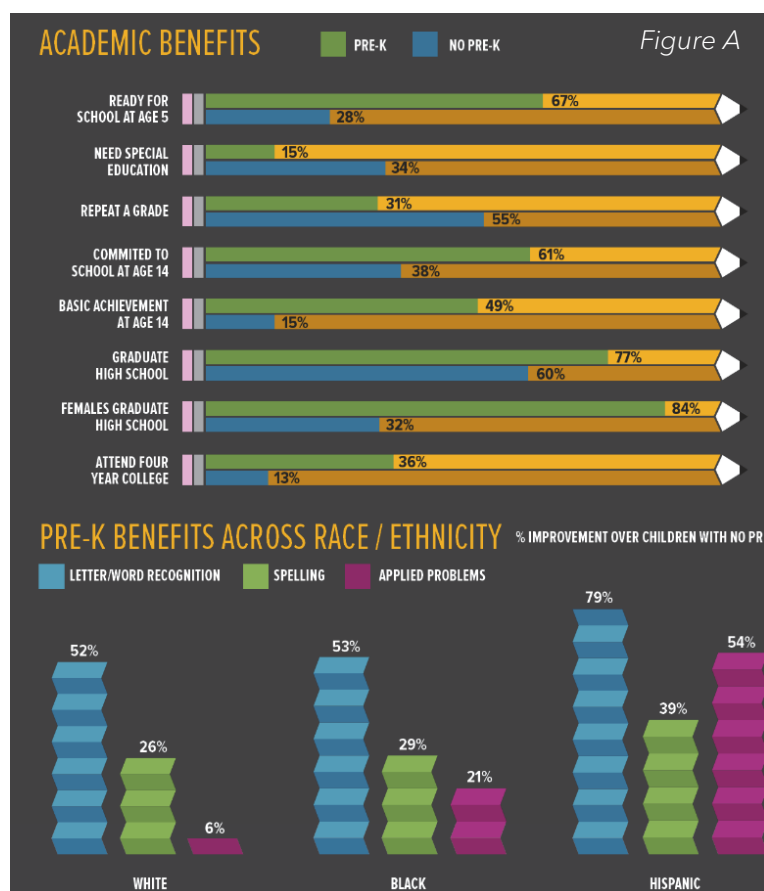
INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, numerous studies cite the importance of a solid foundation of early learning for young children when their brains are sponges for developing language, motor skills, social/emotional learning. By the age of three, a child's brain grows to 80 percent of the volume it will have as an adult, and a two or three year old has as much as twice as many synapses (neural connections) it will have compared to their brain as an adult.^{1,2,3}

Disparities in Access to Preschool

High-quality preschool can be a critical piece of every young child's foundation, reaping numerous academic benefits ranging from higher likelihood of being ready for school at age 5, less likely to repeat a grade, and more likely to graduate high school (Figure A).⁴ According to the Urban Child Institute, White children who had preschool are 52 percent better at recognizing words and letters compared to White children without preschool, a difference that is even more magnified for Hispanic children with preschool (Figure A).⁵ As Figure A suggests, Black and Hispanic children with preschool demonstrate marked improvements in letter/word recognition, spelling, and applied problem-solving compared to Black and Hispanic children without preschool.

Unfortunately, despite the myriad benefits to high-quality preschool, it is out of reach for many families - especially those who are at the intersections of racial inequality *and* income inequality. In Oregon, the cost of child care for preschool age children ranges from \$7,320 to



Graphic reproduced from Pre-K Matters: Exploring the Impact of Pre-Kindergarten on Children and Their Communities. The Urban Child Institute. Available at, <http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/resources/infographics/pre-k-matters>.

¹ Gilmore JH, Lin W, Prasatwa MW, et al. Regional gray matter growth, sexual dimorphism, and cerebral asymmetry in the neonatal brain. *Journal of Neuroscience*. 2007;27(6):1255-1260.

² Nowakowski RS. Stable neuron numbers from cradle to grave. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 2006;103(33):12219-12220.

³ Rakic, P. No more cortical neurons for you. *Science*. 2006;313:928-929.

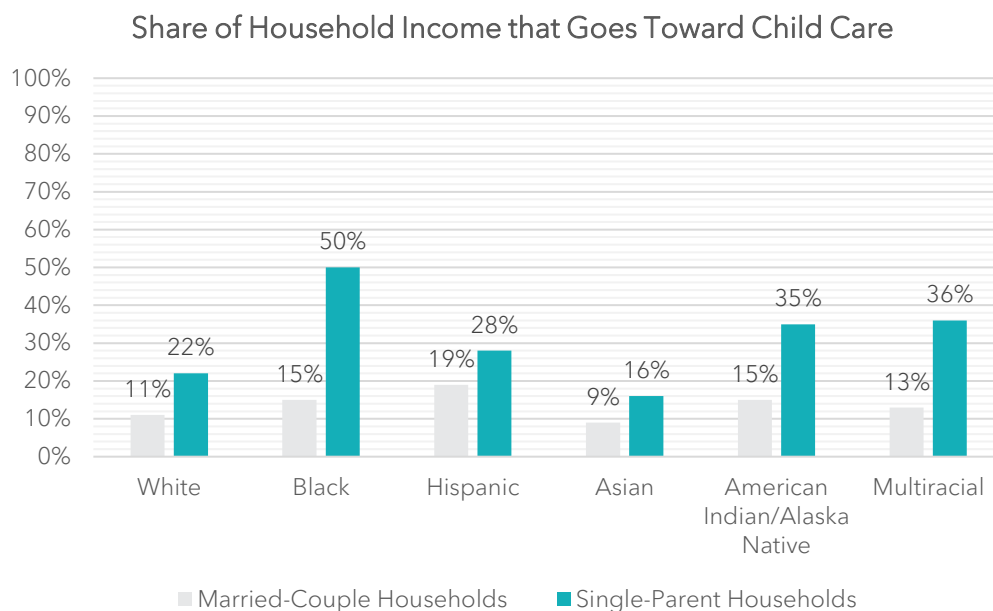
⁴ Pre-K Matters: Exploring the Impact of Pre-Kindergarten on Children and Their Communities. The Urban Child Institute. Available at, <http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/resources/infographics/pre-k-matters>.

⁵ Ibid.



\$12,660 per year.⁶ In Multnomah County, the cost of full-time child care for a preschooler is \$732 per month, which is about 12 percent of the median household income for a family with a child under 6.⁷ For working families of color, this cost burden is even higher. **As shown in Figure A, for Oregon single parent households who are Black, 50 percent of the household income goes to pay for child care, compared to 22 percent of household income for White single parent households.** This trend holds true for most other race/ethnicities as well, highlighting how racial inequities manifest in affordability of and access to child care and preschool. Access to preschool for their child means that parents can go to work trusting their child is cared for while they are away. Without this need fulfilled, our community faces a tremendous tear in our social and economic fabric with only 15 percent of three- and four-year olds in the County having access to preschool.⁸

Figure B



Source: Oregon Fact Sheet, Child Care Aware, 2020, available at: <https://www.childcareaware.org/ccdc/state/or/>.

Cost is not the only barrier that parents with young children face when seeking preschool options – cultural, linguistic, and developmental relevance and accessibility of preschool programs is crucial for families, too. In Multnomah County, 4 out of 10 children under 6 years old are of color.⁹ It is critical that preschool programs are prepared to work with children with various physical abilities and can communicate with children and their parents who speak diverse languages.

⁶ Grobe, D, & Weber, Roberta B. 2018 *Oregon Child Care Market Price Study*, Report for Oregon Department of Human Services. Corvallis, OR: Family Policy Program, Oregon State University, October, 2018.

⁷ Oregon Fact Sheet, Child Care Aware, 2020, available at: <https://www.childcareaware.org/ccdc/state/or/>.

⁸ Preschool for All Report, Summer 2019, Multnomah County.

⁹ Ibid.



Preschool Provider Support

Preschool and child care providers similarly face many barriers to providing their services to families. With only a small fraction of 3- and 4- year olds having access to preschool in Multnomah County, efforts to expand access to more families will need to include expanding the pipeline of early childhood educators who are supported to meet the needs of diverse families. Despite the high cost of preschool and child care, many early childhood staff are not able to afford high-quality care for their own children because of low compensation, lack of benefits, and lack of access to professional learning opportunities. This workforce also tends to be disproportionately women of color, demonstrating even more the need for comprehensive preschool investment that creates equitable opportunities for providers and for parents.

Preschool for All

With a deep understanding of all these inequities in access to preschool, many organizations in Multnomah County have been working for years in various collaborations to expand access to high-quality early childhood services. These include Early Learning Multnomah and its Parent Accountability Council, Multnomah County, and Social Venture Partners. In 2018, Multnomah County Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson convened the Preschool for All Task Force to begin a community-driven visioning process for preschool that addresses the preceding problems, and more. Throughout their framing of the problems and the solutions, the Task Force centered parent voice. The Task Force developed overarching policy that sought to be:

- **Inclusive:** Ensured that voices of families of color are at the center of decision-making.
- **Community-Based:** Solicited input from nearly 100 individuals and over 50 organizations.
- **Comprehensive:** Included policy recommendations that address family access; shortage of the early childhood educator workforce; low pay within the workforce; shortage of preschool classrooms; and partnerships with community-based organizations.

The Preschool for All Task Force sought to ensure that the details of the program design are constructed with input from parents and providers who are intended to be served by the program. In July 2020, Multnomah County published a comprehensive plan for implementing Preschool for All. This report was commissioned to understand what these parents and providers think about a range of issues including, but not limited to:

Parents

- Understanding how quality is perceived for preschool programs
- Hours of preschool
- Transportation needs
- Cultural and linguistic needs
- Access needs
- Communication with providers



- Wrap-around supports needed for parents to feel like Preschool for All is relevant and responsive

Providers

- Supports that providers need to access the Preschool for All program
- Challenges in accessing other publicly funded preschool and/or child care programs
- Barriers to ensuring that children are kept in the preschool and/or child care classroom
- Barriers and needs for expanding their preschool and/or child care classrooms
- Cultural and linguistically appropriate coaching, professional support, and/or training needs

This report shares findings from focus groups and interviews with parents and providers regarding the above topics. It concludes with recommendations to ensure that implementation of Preschool for All matches its intent to create an inclusive and accessible high-quality preschool program for 3- and 4- year olds.



METHODOLOGY

Eleven organizations led recruitment and facilitation for 24 culturally- and linguistically-responsive focus groups and interviews (Figure C). All focus groups and interviews were conducted virtually by phone or video due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the process, 71 providers and nearly 100 parents participated.

Partner organizations were selected because of their long-standing expertise in serving children of color, children who are experiencing disabilities or learning delays, and/or English Language Learners. This priority population of children are the near-term priority in the Preschool for All program due to historic disparities in access to high-quality preschool programs. Each partner’s engagement was unique to their needs and the needs of the parents or providers they serve. In some cases, SeeChange supported or led focus groups. In other cases, the partner organizations led their own focus groups or interviews, or administered surveys. In these cases, recordings, transcripts, and detailed notes were provided to SeeChange for analysis. Across all focus groups and interviews, the core questions were similar but allowed for flexibility to ensure that questions were culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant. Appendix B provides a framework for these partnerships.

Figure C

| Organization | Perspective | Number of Individuals Engaged | Race/Ethnicity/Language Represented |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| AFSCME | Child Care Providers | 34 | American Indian/Alaska Native Asian Black/African America Hispanic or Latino/a/x Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Multiracial White |
| All Born In/Northwest Down Syndrome Association | Parents | 25 | White Biracial Latinx/Spanish-speaking Romanian |
| Black Parent Initiative | Parents | 15 | Black/African American |
| Multnomah County Child Care Resource and Referral | Child Care Providers | 37 | African American Latinx/Spanish-speaking Slavic |
| Early Learning Multnomah’s Parent Leadership Teams - IRCO - KairosPDX - Latino Network - NAYA - Self Enhancement Inc | Parents | 53 | American Indian/Alaska Native Asian/Pacific Islander (Nepalese, Vietnamese, Tongan) Black/African - Somali Black/African American Latinx Slavic |



KEY FINDINGS

This section begins first with findings from parent input and is followed by provider input. The findings affirm and build on years of previous engagement with parents and early care and education providers.

Parent Perspectives

The core components of the Preschool for All plan is that every 3- and 4-year old in Multnomah County is eligible to access the program and that the program is tuition-free. As the program will take several years to reach every 3- and 4-year old, the program intends to prioritize first access to children in the community who have the least access to quality, affordable preschool today (includes Black, Brown, Indigenous, and all children of color; migrant and refugee children; children who speak languages other than English; children with developmental delays and disabilities; and children impacted by the foster care system or experiencing housing instability).

The program is intended to provide for a variety of settings and schedules that are available to families of different needs. For example, some families may prefer home-based programs run by trusted community members, others may prefer Head Start, school-based, or center-based preschool facilities. In addition, the program is intended to offer full-day, half-day, and year-round preschool.

The focus group, interview, and survey questions were intended to verify and understand nuances around the above core components of the program from the perspective of parents.

Quality Preschool Characteristics

Broadly speaking, Preschool for All “focuses on providing joyful, culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, inclusive preschool experiences for all children in Multnomah County.”¹⁰ Focus groups, surveys, and interviews unpacked how a preschool program might specifically demonstrate these characteristics and establish trust with parents. Parents expressed a wide variety of expectations and desired characteristics for their preschool, but the desire for their child to be in a loving, caring environment where they are seen, heard, and appreciated in their unique strengths is ubiquitous and contributes to their feelings of trusting their child’s preschool staff. For example, parents want to know that preschool providers can and want to meet their child’s unique needs, especially when it comes to communicating in the child’s primary language and meeting the needs of a child with disabilities. Parents want preschool providers to

“I can generally tell when a program is genuinely loving and embraces the neurodiverse children among them. Some programs seem tolerant, but there is a different between tolerant and loving...”

¹⁰ Multnomah County. (2020). Preschool for All Plan. Available at: <https://preschoolforall.org/read-preschool-for-alls-plan/>.



show they care about their child by asking questions about the child and family prior to starting the program. Parents want to be asked about their child's strengths, behaviors, communication styles, disabilities, cultural routines and traditions, diet, allergies, and interests.

While it is important for parents that preschool providers take initiative to learn about them and their child, it is also important for parents to know specific information about preschool providers to understand whether they are a good match for their child. Parents may not enroll their child in a preschool program, regardless of whether it is free, if it is not able to meet their needs. Parents who participated in interviews and focus groups were racially and ethnically diverse. Their answers affirmed that no community is a monolith and family preferences cannot be assumed based on identity alone. For some families of color, for example, having preschool teachers and staff who look like their children and offer curriculum that is culturally and racially affirming is desired, but it is not the only priority. Parents across the spectrum want to know what curriculum is offered; what their child will learn and by when; whether there are enough adults in the preschool to offer uninterrupted care; whether staff have had background checks and training; and how substitutes are available in case the primary teachers are unable to work. One parent highlighted the real challenges that parents have to consider when balancing work and parenting, asking, "[a]re there enough adults in the classroom? My daughter was in a single provider daycare. When they got sick, there was no backup option."

"I don't mind if they [preschool teacher] doesn't look like me because diversity is important. My big thing is how you're engaging my child."

In addition to basic information about the preschool program, many parents emphasized the importance of knowing how the preschool is prepared to be culturally-, linguistically-, and developmentally responsive to their child's needs. First and foremost, for families whose native language is not English, parents want to know that they can communicate with their child's preschool teachers and staff. Parents also want to ensure that their child's preschool curriculum will create opportunities to celebrate the rich cultural diversity not only of their own family, but also of other cultures. Many parents stated that one of their hopes for their child's preschool experience is exposure to the diversity of their world at an early age. Stories, activities, art, and music were all named as ways that culture can be brought into the preschool classrooms.

"The classroom must represent the different cultures of the children. And they must celebrate more than just February for Black history."

"I totally agree about the classroom representing all cultures. They must share the great stories and history of Natives - Chippewa, Seminole, and so forth."

"I would want to know - does the program support English Language Learners."



For parents of children with disabilities, **knowing that a program is inclusive and trained in supporting children with disabilities** is by far the determining factor when it comes to choosing a program. Parents want to know that their children will be seen not just for their needs, but also for their strengths. They want their children included in activities without practices that exclude the child from the classroom. **A preschool's expectation of children being fully potty-trained** can also be a significant barrier for children with disabilities or learning delays.

"Are students with [Individualized Family Service Plans¹] fully included and immersed in the day? (No special treatment or special placement during circle time, etc.). And are the teachers willing and excited to learn about my child's interests and incorporate those into everyday learning? Not just look at IFSP, but look at my child?"

"Finding an affordable preschool that provided diaper changes for our son was extremely challenging. We do not qualify for Head Start and most affordable preschools would not/could not change his diaper. However, I found a great preschool that was clean, bright, friendly, and extremely accommodating to all of my son's needs, including using sign language and diaper changes."

Exclusion and Bias

Children of color and children with disabilities experience preschool suspension and expulsion at disproportionate rates.¹¹ Children of color who also experience disabilities and learning delays are excluded at even higher rates. It is considered best practice to include preschool students in the least restrictive environment with their peers who do not have disabilities. However, the reality is that this is not what students with disabilities and their parents experience.¹²

To address this issue and to ensure children are in the least restrictive classroom environments possible, Preschool for All will prohibit participating preschool providers from suspending or expelling students. In focus groups, surveys, and interviews, parents were eager to know how this would work in practice. They shared their experiences with exclusion from preschool. In K-12 settings, students are expelled or suspended with very explicit notices. In preschool settings, exclusion from the classroom is more subtle. The practice often manifests as requests that the child not return to school or that the provider was not a "good fit" to meet the child's needs. Parents do not want their child expelled, but they also do not want them to stay in a program that is not interested in meeting their child's needs and appreciating their strengths. Parents provided suggestions for ensuring that providers are supported to create truly inclusive learning environments, preventing intentional or unintentional exclusion from the classroom.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (March 21, 2014) *Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline)* <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>

¹² Northwest Disability Support. (2020) *Preschool for All input*



Parents whose child was suspended or expelled from preschool generally felt that the preschool's decision to exclude the child from school was a surprise with no prior communication about patterns of challenging incidences. For example, one parent stated that, "[m]y son was terminated from a preschool 2 years ago. [The teacher] told us he needed early intervention and rather than try to work with our family, she simply terminated his enrollment. We were blindsided. We had never been told that there were any issues with his behavior. We knew he needed Early Intervention and were actually in the process of having him evaluated." Another parent stated, "[u]ltimately, he was expelled because they were not willing to use the [Individualized Family Service Plans (ISFP)] supports. I do not want him in a school that isn't willing to adhere to the IFSP and doesn't see [my child] as a valuable member of the classroom."

Concrete ways that parents would like to see as alternative avenues to address challenging behavior prior to exclusion of their child include:

- **Immediate communication to parents when issues arise.** Parents do not want to be surprised by something that has become a big challenge when it could have been addressed in partnership earlier on. When parents are not aware of behaviors at school immediately, they feel like their ability to support their child's success is taken away.
- **Support to find a solution that meets the child's needs and the school's needs.** Often, parents do not know where to turn to for help in navigating issues with their school or with their child. Parents are interested in tangible ways to support their child that allows them to stay in a loving preschool classroom environment. One parent said, "[i]nstead of expelling her from preschool, explore with me the better way to support her, to cover all her needs." Relatedly, some parents stated that providers should have access to free coaching and training to make sure that they know how to address behavior challenges before these challenges become so problematic that the providers feel there is no other option other than exclusion. Prevention was a key theme.

"If I find out 3 days after, then how am I supposed to parent? If my kid starts to normalize [their behavior, other children's behavior, or adults' response to behavior]. That turns into a whole different situation."

Location and Services

As the number of publicly funded preschool slots expected to increase from less than 5,000 to 15,000 by 2030-31,¹³ facilities to house preschool classrooms will need to expand significantly. One area of interest is knowing where these preschool classrooms should be physically located to be convenient for families. While parent preferences in terms of geographic location varied depending on where they live, there was consensus that a location close to their homes would be preferable. The most common mode of transportation to and from preschool is driving and public transit (including bus and light rail). Few parents mentioned their likelihood of walking or biking to preschool. For families who drive, location is less of a barrier. For families who rely on public transportation for preschool, the preschool is desired near transit lines.

¹³ Multnomah County. (2020). Preschool for All Plan. Available at: <https://preschoolforall.org/read-preschool-for-alls-plan/>.



Convenient locations are not just about physical location of the preschool, but also what other services that parents can access at or near the preschool. Parents want **additional services adjacent to or connected with preschool**. Interpretation and translation services was an overwhelming preference for parents for whom English is not their first or preferred language. In addition, several parents said that it would be helpful for preschools to have an emergency fund accessible to parents for emergency utility or rental assistance. One parent expressed the need as follows: “[r]enting help, electricity help would be good...If you’re so stressed with basic needs, worrying about how to pay rent and bills, how are you going to focus on your kid?”

Other wrap-around services that many parents would like at or near their child’s preschool include therapeutic services for children with disabilities and mental health services, for themselves and for their children. Food, clothing, and classes for parents (such as English language or GED classes) were also mentioned by many parents across groups.

Child Care Career Development

As the Preschool for All plan acknowledges, serving all 3-and 4-year olds in the county will require significant development and expansion of the provider workforce. **A significant number of parents are interested in becoming preschool providers. In order to make the career transition, parents need support to access training (including scholarships), child care during their training, business support to launch, and assurance that being a preschool provider can be a respected, living wage job.**

“I was a care provider in Washington, but not here...I took all the Oregon certification trainings last year and have done the registry. I need help finding a space.”

“I want to open a child care business geared for deaf and hard of hearing facility. Scholarships would be helpful.”

“Childcare is so expensive. I bring my children with me to class.”

A few parents noted their interest in providing preschool for children with disabilities or foster children. They specifically named **specialized training and support in launching their businesses as some of their biggest needs, in addition to scholarships or grants to access this training and support.**

Some parents noted that while they may not be ready to launch a preschool or child care business of their own soon, they do want opportunities to assist in existing preschool classrooms. Parents of children with disabilities have lived experience that many preschool providers could learn from. For example, a mother who described herself as having a “special need’s child” said that she believes “that I can be of great support at preschool. Because I am passionate about helping children with special needs.” Another parent said, “I like to work with children, and I believe there has to be more staff that could speak Spanish to the children.”



Provider Perspectives

Throughout focus groups and interviews, providers shared their experiences, suggestions, and frustrations with publicly funded child care or preschool programs, providing insight in how a new program like Preschool for All might be structured to address the challenges they experience. Overall, providers are generally interested in receiving more support – both for addressing children’s needs and for addressing their own needs as a business owner. However, their day-to-day realities include long hours and few breaks, which makes it challenging to access training, coaching or support. Providers in most focus groups stated that when coaching and training is provided only in English, only during 9:00am and 5:00pm during weekdays, or requires substantial pre-requisite training, the support feels less accessible to them. In addition, providers noted that when programs require significant training to participate in public programs, this is a clear barrier to access. This is especially true for providers whose native language is not English and for providers of color.

Professional Learning and Support

The Preschool for All plan includes a framework for providers to become “Ready to Implement” that acknowledges that each preschool provider’s path to participating in Preschool for All will be different. According to focus groups and interviews, preschool providers want a wide range of opportunities that reflect their lived experiences and meet their unique needs.

Providers stated that they benefit from personal and professional networks through which they can connect to people with similar experiences and get actionable ideas and tools, such as advice in working with families, contract templates, and lesson plans. Providers noted that there are local models for how these networks can be structured. A key component of what was shared was that the coaching and professional support comes from people who share aspects of identity – primarily, language or cultural background. **No matter how relevant the content of the coaching is, if it is not provided in provider’s native language, it is not accessible.** Many providers, particularly those whose native language is Spanish, clearly pointed to the lack of Spanish language training and coaching with few exceptions.

Additionally, because many providers engaged through this focus group and interview process participate in Focus Child Care Networks, this was one structure that was seen as a positive way to connect providers to one another. These Networks are aimed to increase the supply of high quality child care providers among priority populations that can serve children of color.¹⁴ They are staffed by Quality Improvement Specialists that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the cohort of child

“If we united several child cares as one, we can have different groups - age groups - and get a different license. As a single caregiver it is hard. But together we could have a center, a bigger business.”

“Lots of support from the network. The people in the chapter group have a lot of wisdom- business-wise, working with children, working with parents.”

¹⁴ Oregon Early Learning Division. (2017). Focus Child Care Network Fact Sheet. Available at: <https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/QRIS-FCN.pdf>.



care providers. The Specialist provides individualized coaching and support to the cohort based on their unique needs in the languages that providers are comfortable.

Even providers who are not engaged in a formal network find support in other child care or preschool providers. For example, one provider said they get, “[m]ost of what [support] I get is from my provider network. They’ll call me a lot. Tell me how to navigate the different systems, how to get paid, how to bill correctly with programs like Head Start. There’s not formal training.”

In addition to access to professional networks of other providers, **providers want more business training and hand-on learning.** Providers can more easily find training about providing care and working with children, but they want support with things like managing employees, managing facilities, contracts, benefits, business development, managing finances, and understanding profitability. For example, one provider described her experience after recently transitioning from one provider type to another as their capacity to serve more kids grew: “I got so bogged down in the financials. I got a [Quickbooks] training, and there’s no one to reach out to when we get stumped. Balance sheets were not coming out right. It was horrible to find a bookkeeper. Another provider reported a similar concern with business management as follows: “I need resources on how to navigate being an employer. Working on retirement plans and the business stuff is where the most support is needed.”

When providers do get these additional supports, they want special consideration to be provided for instances when providers offer care in their own homes. In these situations, there is an intimacy with the provider offering their personal space as a classroom environment for parents’ young children. Coaches or trainers that come into these environments with the intention to help the provider should be attuned to the sensitivity that it requires to inspect and/or provide support in these unique settings. One provider summed this up, “[t]his is way more than my business- these are my babies and this is my home.”

Program Expectations and Requirements

Preschool for All will expect participating providers to meet a set of standards aligned Oregon’s Early Learning and Kindergarten Guidelines. Support and training aligned to these standards will be offered to providers. When public agencies send observers to classrooms to check for compliance with standards, providers often report feeling uncomfortable. Many appreciate the feedback, however. To make these instances a positive experience, providers said they would like to see support that honors their culture and experience. In fact, focus groups and interviews indicated that culturally specific support and resources are as important for preschool providers as they are for parents. Additionally, providers reported wanting their relationship with classroom observers and/or coaches to feel like a partnership rather than a punishment. **Providers mentioned that developing relationships with observers/licensers over time** is helpful in feeling like they are on the same team working to do what is best for children.

“Especially in the first year, I was so nervous. I had anxiety about [compliance visits or observations]. But with more experience, I’m getting used to it. I’m still nervous, but not as much. Once you get to know the people who work with you, you accept advice, and do improvements together. The more experience you have, the more you know the people and the process.”



Expansion

Preschool for All will work with existing providers to build preschool capacity in Multnomah County. Building capacity will require expanding the physical infrastructure for preschool classrooms. A few providers spoke about a vision for a space with multiple classrooms for different ages, shared outdoor space, and culturally specific support in the same building. However, they recognized that vision would be realized with the support of partners and financial resources.

Many providers did express desire to expand their programs. When asked what gets in the way of expansion, they named these as the most common barriers:

- **Perceptions that expanding is a risky business venture and/or requires a lot of up-front investment.** One provider stated, "I would be interested in expanding but would need to pay for expanding. Hard to make those investments when you don't know revenue for sure. More costs." Another stated that it was hard to understand whether the costs of expansion outweighed the financial benefit, describing their financial tracking as "money in and money out" with little understanding of profitability.
- **Challenges in navigating the real estate market,** making expansion inaccessible to many. Ability to find rental spaces for child care was a particular barrier. One provider stated, "Finding other locations is a barrier on top of cost. If you're wanting to find a home, there's not much rental capacity for child care. We'd need to be able to find spaces to go to." Another provider described that they wound up with a child care facility in Southeast Portland "because of gentrification," while another recounted her work with the City of Portland to find rental space after rental space that had been deemed unavailable for child care.

Participation in Public Programs

Because Preschool for All will be another publicly funded preschool program, some of the provider-focused questions were intended to understand the perceptions, barriers, and challenges perceived of existing publicly funded programs. Many providers describe that the passion they have for serving children is in conflict with programs that are perceived to be rigid, mired in bureaucratic "red tape," and out of touch with provider and family needs.

Providers across multiple focus groups reported negative experiences with two State of Oregon-funded programs, Preschool Promise and Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC). These two programs have especially shaped providers' perceptions of programs run by government agencies. Specifically, providers stated that: a) documentation requirements are burdensome, b) that payment rates are too low for the time required to comply with requirements, c) that rules related to

"The amount of paperwork is a lot. It's hard to record everything, arrival times, meals, etc. in the moment and it takes time away from being with the children. I would rather do it after the children leave."

"Trying to figure out how meeting all of the new rules and regulations is supposed to be done and how [the State] thinks it's possible to do everything in one day. We can't put [children's] needs on hold while the adults are trying to do everything they are required to do."



attendance and food are confusing, and d) that there is little transparency and predictability in understanding how much providers should expect to receive each month per child.

One provider mentioned that they have repeatedly put into situations where they are providing care for free to parents because their ERDC eligibility changed from one month to the next and there was not notification to the provider. Because the reimbursement is retroactive, the care had already been provided and not reimbursed. The provider stated that, "I pride myself for providing high quality day care for low-income parents. I don't expect that parents are going to pay. I've been burned so much by ERDC and DHS." The provider noted that because they care about the children they serve and the families, it is not as if they would have stopped care anyway. However, it was noted in the group conversation that publicly funded programs should not rely on the empathy and goodwill of a mostly female-provider workforce to provide free care. Providers stated that the lack of communication around eligibility and predictability of income for providers - especially when they have little business support - is a significant barrier that they would like to see addressed in Preschool for All.

"I've partnered with Early Head Start and I know the paperwork and the bureaucracy that comes with the nice paycheck that you get. That's why I haven't done Preschool Promise."

Despite the challenges associated with Preschool Promise and ERDC, some providers did express appreciation for a relatively easily accessible public program - the Child Care Initiative Grant provided by Child Care Resource and Referral. One provider called this program "incredibly easy to work with" because the requirements are minimal, consisting of verifying income of parents once a year, receiving attendance records regularly, signing an annual contract, and other technical requirements.

In exchange, providers get the certainty of knowing that slot is paid for through the entire year. However, two providers noted that even this program created a barrier for providers because it requires SPARK certification. This certification itself requires a level of education that many providers, especially those of color and/or whose native language is not English, have not typically had access to.

Preventing Exclusion, Suspension and Expulsion

With Preschool for All's prohibition of suspensions or expulsion, providers will need additional staffing, professional coaching/support, and other resources from external partners and coaches to be able to inclusively serve all families. Providers want more support for children who express themselves in challenging or disruptive behaviors, including coaching or on-site support. Providers want their staff and the parents they serve to have access to this training as well. Specifically, many providers are interested in having other providers, therapists, or mental health professionals come into a program to work with a child. For example, one provider said, "Morrison Center had counselors-which could be helpful depending on the parents and the situation and the child."

Other specific concerns that providers noted included:

- **Concerns that they are often faced with situations where asking a family to leave the program is more about the guardian's behavior than the child's behavior.** For example, one provider noted, "[t]here can be issues with families around pick-up (having children picked up by people who aren't approved) and breaking contracts."



- **Perceptions that they may lose their state license to operate if they feel like they do not address a child's behavior.** "More support for the parents. Had a child that was opening the gate and running away. We had meetings with the parents to talk about why the kid was doing that. It is hard for the provider if there is a kid causing harm to the degree that the provider could lose their license."



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Preschool for All should encourage and support clear and simple intake processes in the native language of the parents.** This process should give providers an opportunity to learn about a child and family prior to the first day of preschool, and give parents the opportunity to learn about the approach of the preschool and meet the teachers. Specific components of this intake process could include simple ways that the teachers can communicate language skills of the teachers and staff; cultural, racial/ethnic representation of the teachers and staff; and understanding what will be taught and how. This intake process should also include sharing expectations and protocols for communicating when behavior concerns arise – including which specific behaviors will trigger same-day parent notification.
2. **The Preschool for All data infrastructure and process for qualifying providers should collect information regarding a) racial/ethnic background of preschool staff and languages they speak; b) hours of care (including before and aftercare options); c) programs' ability and willingness to serve children with learning delays and disabilities; d) whether the program expects children to be potty-trained, e) distance relative to public transit lines, and f) whether additional wrap-around services are located at or near the preschool** (including mental health care and clothing and food support). This information should be available to families and community-based organizations that serve families in accessible ways so that parents can easily find programs that meet their unique needs.
3. **The physical location of new or expanded preschool sites should be on or near public transit in areas of the County that have a high proportion of families in priority population of Preschool for All.** Wrap-around service offerings could include ensuring that providers can connect parents to a pool of emergency funds to assist families they serve with rent and utilities. This fund should be administered by the County, rather than providers directly.
4. **To realize Preschool for All's vision for ensuring no suspensions or expulsions occur in preschool settings, all participating preschool programs should have access to professional support, coaching, and resources for appropriate staffing in preschool programs.** In general, one-off training opportunities will not be enough to create the conditions where children are in safe and inclusive environments. Instead, providers should have access to structured networking opportunities where they have a chance to share with each other their own expertise, learn best practices for creating the least restrictive environments possible so that children are not separated from their peers unnecessarily, and connect about shared challenges and opportunities. In addition, the County should consider providing weighted funding for programs that serve children with learning delays or disabilities to encourage and support appropriate staffing for individualized attention.
5. **Culturally specific organizations and organizations that work with priority populations in culturally and linguistically responsive ways should be funded partners to support recruitment and initial training for parents that want to become preschool providers.**
6. **Professional development provided through Preschool for All should prioritize relationship-based, on-going support that honors and appreciates the intimacy that is often involved in caring with young children.** This should include investing in existing and new culturally specific child care and preschool provider networks that build a system of relevant support.



7. **Support for Preschool for All providers should be available in multiple languages, and be provided in evening and weekend options.** These opportunities should be broadcast through existing formal networks, labor unions, and other informal networks through social media. Support must include early learning specific training as well as business and operations training and guidance.
8. **Professional support and coaching for in-home providers should be individualized to attend to the intimate, unique nature of these settings.** This could include assigning one point of contact for coaching and professional support and recognizing that an in-home provider's family is often integrated into the program.
9. **Preschool for All should invest in the capacity of mental health service providers, therapists, and coaches to support preschool providers as well as the parents they serve, and ensure that preschool providers know how to access these supports.** Services and coaching provided to families or providers will better serve children if they are coordinated across home and school environments. Providers and parents want to be on the same page around how best to support their children.
10. **Because the families who will be prioritized by Preschool for All face a multitude of structural barriers to accessing other public services, holistic wrap-around supports should be provided to the priority families.** This includes considering how other public resources can be leveraged in systematic ways to minimize the bureaucratic hurdles that families face.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: Parent and Provider Focus Group Questions

Sample Questions:

These were edited and adjusted by each partner before use.

Parents

1. What information do you want to know about a program before enrolling your child there? How would you decide to choose one program over another?
2. What do you think is important for the preschool teachers to know about your child before your child starts preschool there? (for example: strengths, language skills, cultural traditions, routines, needs, disabilities, etc).
3. Has your child ever been excluded from a preschool or school and what did you find as supports to help you and your family through that experience? What would you have wanted to happen instead?
4. What hours of care for your child(ren) works best for your family?
5. What is the most convenient location to drop your child off at preschool?
6. How important is it that your child care or preschool be close to a bus or MAX stop? (very important, somewhat important, not at all important)
7. What other resources, services or supports do you wish would be at the same location where you dropped off your child?
8. What would make you interested in being a child care provider for your child and other children?

Early Care and Education Providers

1. What are your hopes and dreams for yourself as a teacher? For the children in your care? What gets in the way?
2. What support do you currently have to help you serve your kids or run your program? What support do you wish you had?
 - o How do you currently find/hire new staff or substitutes?
3. Have you thought about expansion and if so, what barriers have you faced?
4. What support or resources would help you prevent suspensions or expulsions in your program?
5. Would you be interested in having a culturally specific organization work with you to expand or support your program? If you are interested, why?
6. How does it feel when people coming into your space to assess your program? What makes it a positive experience?



APPENDIX B: Community Engagement Framework

The framework below was developed before the pandemic. In practice, all sessions became virtual and budgets were adjusted to recognize the additional coordination required and the lack of catering.

Community Engagement Framework for Preschool for All Implementation

SeeChange is contracted by Multnomah County to coordinate outreach to families and preschool providers to inform Preschool for All implementation details. Reaching out to racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse families and providers is a key priority to ensure that Preschool for All is equitable and designed to close opportunity gaps in our community. This framework represents a recognition that too often, community-based organizations that serve historically underserved communities are not resourced to coordinate input gathering from their communities to support government agencies with policy development and implementation. While these partners serve families with basic and immediate needs on a day-to-day basis, we acknowledge that there are substantial operational components (including time and resource) that must go into each and every focus group, parent cafe, or community engagement session for policy and program input. To acknowledge this dynamic, this proposal represents a path to compensate our partners for their work, their expertise, and their value. We acknowledge that this proposal perpetuates limited duration and narrow funding that does little to address the operational needs of these organizations.

Proposed engagement structure:

- **Connect with organizations** that have existing relationships in the communities from which input is sought to gauge interest and availability.
- **In partnership, determine the financial support of the engagements**, including:
 - Gift cards or stipends for participating families
 - Resources for catering
 - Financial support directly to the organization for the coordinating efforts
- **Co-develop questions** to ensure the Preschool for All questions are accessible given cultural and linguistic considerations. (SeeChange can provide draft as starting point.)
- **Create space in each engagement for ~4-8 questions to be asked to inform Preschool for All implementation.** With partner permission, SeeChange can attend to document the responses.
- **Staff and SeeChange review recommendations in partnership**- reflecting back what we think we heard from the process as a whole
- **Share the final report back to the community** in whatever ways the organization desires to do so.



Appendix C

Preschool for All Input

“Getting an education is not only their right,
but a passport to a better future.”

Harry Belafonte



September 8, 2020

Jamie Burch

**NW DISABILITY
SUPPORT**



**Each of us
is great because
each of us
has something
great to offer.**

martin luther king jr.



Introduction

NW Disability Support

Northwest Down Syndrome Association (NWDSA) and All Born In Community (ABI) are programs of the non-profit organization NW Disability Support (NWDS). Since 1997 NWDS has been providing resources and support to families. Today NW Disability Support serves over 3,800 individuals across Oregon, throughout Washington, and beyond.

NWDS is Oregon's Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) working with families of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, birth to 26, to help parents participate effectively in their children's education and development, and to partner with professionals and policy makers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities. NW Disability Support recognizes parents are the one constant in their child(ren)'s lives, and the expert of their child.

To support parents, youth with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD), and professionals NWDS provides educational trainings, social events, an inclusive education conference, and resources to replace isolation and fear with knowledge, relationships, and empowerment. NW Disability Support believes informed, empowered individuals are the foundation for social change and disability pride.

NWDS creates high-quality, innovative projects and programs rooted in disability rights and inclusion. NW Disability Support has a history of identifying needs and barriers, navigating education and other systems, advocating for inclusion, and intersectional, cross-disability work. NWDS promotes equity and equality for inclusive lives and communities. NW Disability Support's culture of work is connecting with community members, assessing needs, and accelerating change.

Scope of Work

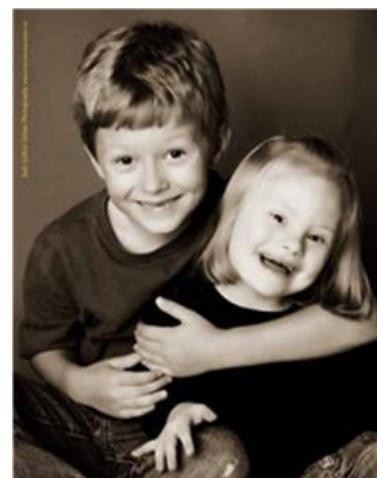
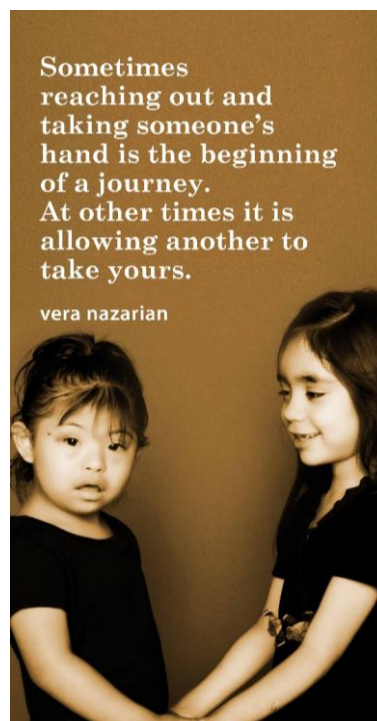
Inform Implementation

NW Disability Support will gather parent feedback and share input and data with SeeChange. SeeChange is contracted with Multnomah County to coordinate outreach to diverse communities to inform Preschool for All implementation.

NWDS will connect with parents who have children with intellectual/developmental disabilities, including parents whose first language is not English, parents who identify other than white/Caucasian, and parents with limited income. Parents of children with disabilities are as distinct as parents with children without disabilities, and children with disabilities themselves.

Reaching out to parents of children with IDD who are linguistically, racially, and economically diverse is a priority to ensure that Preschool for All implementation is responsive to the needs and realities of all parents and all children, including children with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their parents. Equity and inclusion are priorities of NW Disability Support. Collecting stories and information from parents of children with IDD is a scope of work that important to the organization and to the implementation of Preschool for All.

Children with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their parents have interactions and experiences with preschools, public school, community education, and college that are unique to ableism. Even though systemic educational inclusion of all students, including students with IDD, is best practice, students with intellectual/developmental disabilities are disproportionately segregated and restrained/isolated at school.





Behind every child who believes in themselves is a parent who believed first.



Work

Outreach

NWDS co-developed parent survey questions with SeeChange. NW Disability Support formed the survey questions with culture appropriateness and accessibility for diverse communities in mind. The organization then translated the parent questions into Spanish. An online survey was created with the English and Spanish parent questions in a written format online.

NWDS reached out to request parent participants for Preschool for All input through multiple means including Facebook (post and Messenger), email, and phone. Parents of children with disabilities were offered an opportunity to inform and shape Preschool for All implementation.

Of the one hundred forty-four parents outreached to one hundred fourteen spoke English and thirty spoke Spanish. One hundred twenty-nine live in Multnomah County and have children with disabilities age two to seven years old. The remaining fifteen parents either live in Multnomah County but have children that are not age two to seven or do not live in Multnomah County.

Although a virtual focus group or peer discussion session to gather information from parents was proposed based on the needs of the community, we gathered information in ways that worked for them. Some families reported not having internet access and/or familiarity with the Zoom online meeting platform, had a conflict in proposed Zoom meeting times or dates, had children at home or work to attend to. Parents were not able to participate in an online focus group or peer discussion but would agree to participate through providing information by phone or by completing the SurveyMonkey parent survey online independently.

This summer with the current pandemic families may be facing more barriers and inequities than before due to added challenges around the current pandemic and this unique time.

Qualitative Data

Gather Parent Feedback

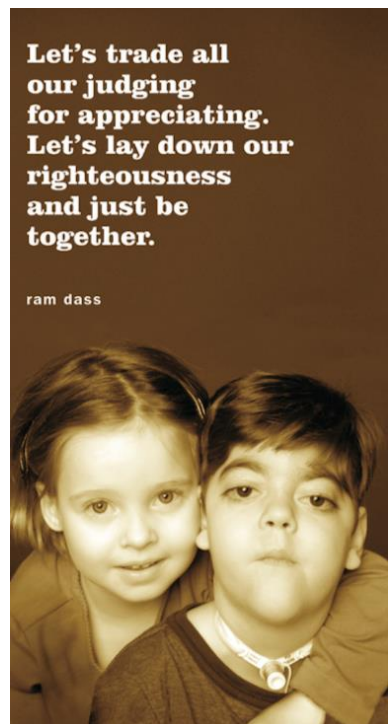
Parents who spoke Spanish answered the survey over the telephone with support. Maria Rangel, NWDSA/ABI Spanish Outreach Coordinator, called parents and had success reaching ten Spanish speaking parents of children with disabilities by telephone. The majority of the ten parents who participated in the phone survey are parents who regularly participate in NW Disability events, trainings, and conference.

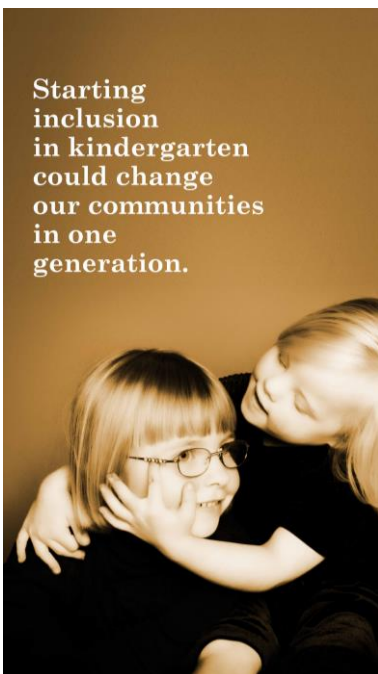
Maria had established a relationship with many of the parents who participated prior to the survey. They participated because they trust her and the work of NWDS.

Most over the phone surveys took from thirty minutes to one hour to complete. The survey questions were asked conversationally in Spanish, then the parent answers were summarized and confirmed with the parent, and she entered the parent answers manually into SurveyMonkey directly to the online parent survey.

Parents also asked Maria questions about NW Disability Support and resources, community programs and resources, including information on pandemic EBT and DDS funds related to Covid-19, and information about their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Maria assessed needs and provided immediate resources during the call.

A reoccurring theme parents mentioned about preschool was that they would like trained staff who could support their children's diverse needs. Many were unaware that their child's rights and that their needs could be met in the regular classroom with students without disabilities. They were told their child's needs could only be met in a segregated environment and a separate curriculum.





Qualitative Data

Gather Parent Feedback

Parents who spoke English answered the survey independently with a SurveyMonkey link. Jamie Burch, NWDSA/ABI Projects and Community Coordinator emailed and sent Facebook Messenger messages to parents and had success reaching fifteen English speaking parents of children with IDD. The majority of the fifteen parents who participated in the independent survey are parents who regularly participate in NW Disability Support events, trainings, and conference.

Jamie had a parent to parent connection with many of the parents who participated prior to the survey. They participated because of their fostered relationship, her offers of support, and the easy access to the online survey. Some parents asked Jamie questions, during the initial request outreach, about their child's IEP.

The independent parent survey took from fifteen to thirty minutes to complete. The online survey questions were presented in English and Spanish, parents answered questions manually using checkboxes, multiple choice, and other/comment boxes, then submitted the survey upon completion.

Parents shared their concerns with Jamie about distance learning this fall. Jamie shared information and suggestions for IEP goals that access general education and curriculum, and accommodations to reduce barriers and support their child's independence.

A recurring theme parents mentioned about school was how challenging distance learning will be for them and their child with disabilities, and that they hope it is not a wasted year in their child's learning. Many were unaware how they would manage their employment and their child's distance learning. They were left feeling desperate and powerless around inclusion at a distance and their child's access to general education curriculum.

Quantitative Data

Parent Feedback

Twenty-five parents of children with intellectual/developmental disabilities answered twenty-three questions for the NW Disability Support Preschool for All parent input survey. The questions asked were on preschool eligibility and enrollment, suspension and expulsion, program model and supports, access to parent development opportunities, and personal/demographic information.

For eligibility and enrollment question four, one hundred percent parents answered it was important for teachers to know about their child’s needs before they start preschool. Ninety-six percent said it was important to know about their child’s disability. Beside the options listed as answer choices parents shared they also wanted teachers to know about their child’s personality and how they learn.

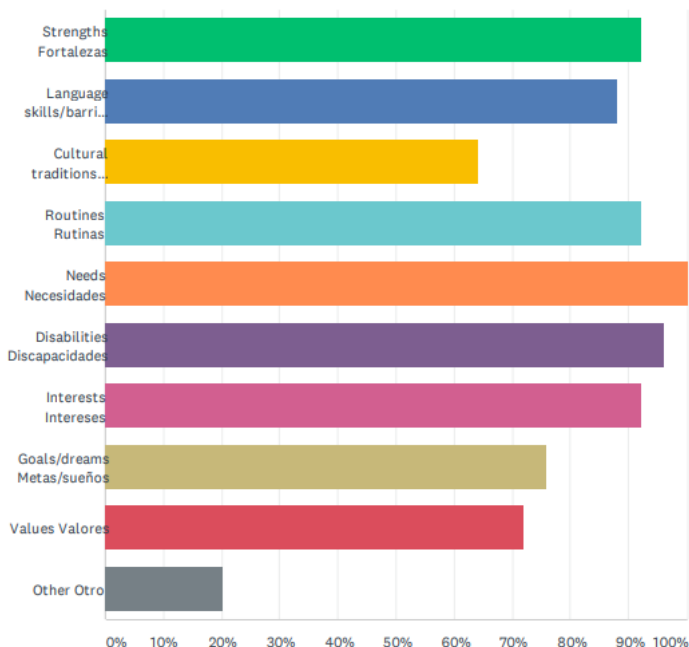
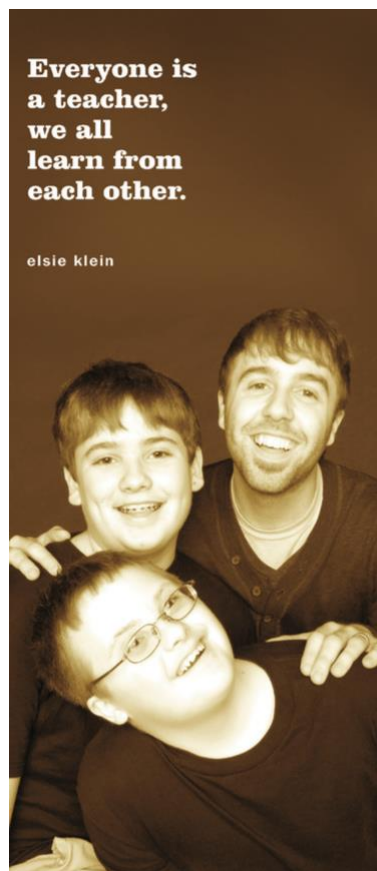


Figure 1: Q4 Eligibility and Enrollment: What do you think is important for preschool teachers to know about your child before they start there?





Quantitative Data

Parent Feedback

For program model and supports question eleven, one hundred percent of parents answered that a preschool can be welcoming by promoting and practicing inclusion of children with disabilities, and by promoting and practicing that all children belong and are valued. Beside the options listed as answer choices parents shared trained “staff who have the passion to work to support all children and their various needs” and “permit parent involvement” would also be welcoming.

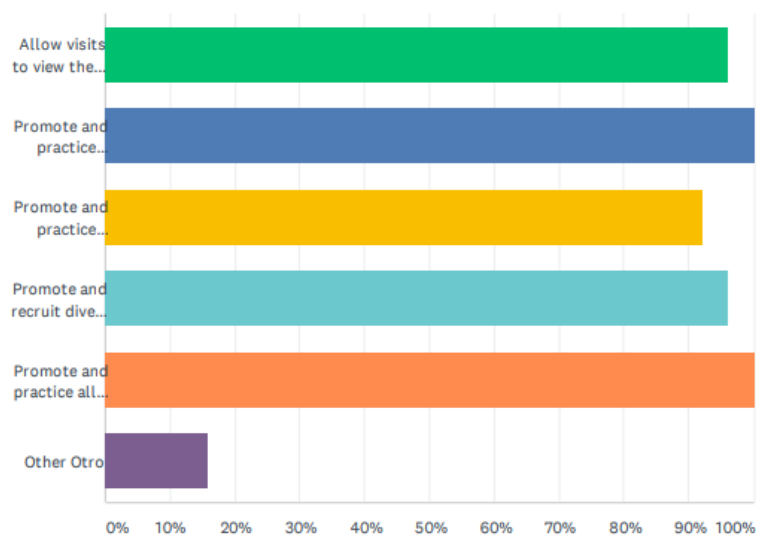


Figure 2: Q11 Program Model and Supports: How can a preschool or school be welcoming?

For program model and supports question twelve, one hundred percent of parents answered what was not welcoming was preschools that didn’t collaborate with early intervention, didn’t allow children who weren’t potty trained, and didn’t allow a child because of disability. Beside the options listed as answer choices parents shared it wasn’t welcoming to “force parents to jump through bureaucratic hoops just to meet with a human,” “by not providing the support my daughter needs to have,” “having no staff who are trained to deal with children’s diverse needs,” and not preparing their staff to “accommodate all languages.”

Reflection

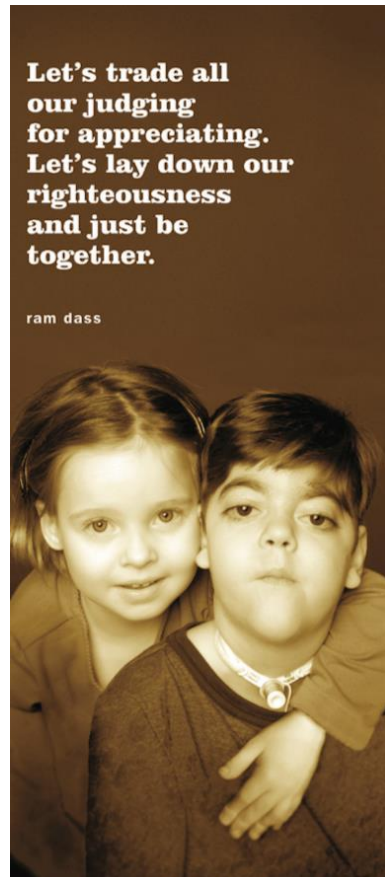
Disability and Preschool

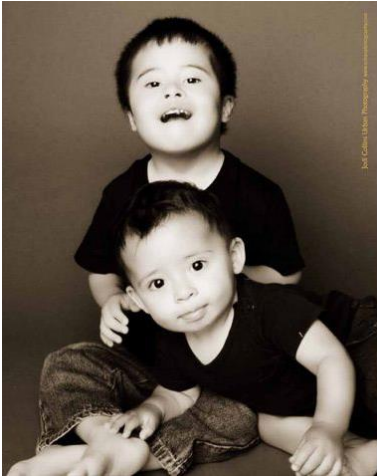
Often the only preschool option provided to parents of young children with disabilities is a separate and segregated school district program for only preschoolers with disabilities. Many students are bussed across town and are not learning with their neighborhood peers without disabilities.

Some parents do not know their child's rights or their parent rights under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for preschool. Two crucial rights are that students with disabilities have access to general education curriculum and peers without disabilities. Not only is it a right it also best practice.

Although, best practice is to include preschool students in the least restrictive environment with peers who do not have disabilities this is not what students with disabilities and their parents experience. Students with disabilities and students of color are disproportionately excluded from general education instructional and social opportunities. Students with disabilities should be educated by the same highly qualified general educators as every other student. Decades of inclusion research proves all learners benefit from the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Not being included in preschool impacts inclusion in kindergarten, later grades, and a student's educational career. If a student is educated in inclusion the data collected will show that is where they make educational progress. If a student is educated in segregation the data collected can be used to build a case for continued segregation. Students should be building a record of inclusion not segregation. Once a parent consents to segregation students often spend the rest of their school years in self-contained classrooms.





Reflection

Disability and Preschool

Educational segregation is supposed to be the last option not the first, yet it is what educators recommend to parents. Inclusion is the least restrictive option and inclusive settings are where all students should start. If students need supports and services those can be added to natural environments instead of students being removed to more restrictive settings. Only after all options are exhausted should a more restrictive environment be considered. With today's technology and inclusive best practices, the options are endless, and segregation could not occur.

All students are general education students first. In that case students with disabilities should receive special education supports and services in general education. Special education is a service not a place, but most schools send children with disabilities to an isolated special education room instead of providing special education services in an accessible regular education classroom.

Not only does research show that students with disabilities who are included have higher academic levels than segregated peers, it also shows they also fair better as adults. Keeping the future in mind is critical to success after school. Thinking about end goals can support students with IDD to take steps toward adult life and after school dreams.

Separate is not equal, yet disability segregation is culturally accepted and commonly practiced. Disability prejudice and fears lower expectations and limit people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. No other underrepresented group can lawfully be segregated. The constructed normalcy of ableism needs to be dismantled. A socially just educational system would eliminate discrimination and segregation and promote and practice the equality and equity of inclusion. The inclusion of students with disabilities is a right, not a privilege.

Conclusion

Summary

Findings collected by parents who participated in the NW Disability Support Preschool for All survey are consistent with information the organization consistently receives from parents. Parents want an affordable, safe, inclusive preschool, in their community, with staff that can speak their first language. They want their child to receive a high-quality preschool experience, by trained staff who can provide accommodations and support, so their child has access to age appropriate curriculum and neighborhood peers without disabilities.

They want their child to “learn the social and emotional skills of being around...peers,” “age appropriate...skills and school readiness,” “sharing and...numbers and letters,” “self-regulation, autonomy, how to be independent, how to...be kind, how to listen,” and “how to follow instruction from the teacher.” Parents want their child to learn “reading, writing,” “saying please and thank you, apologizing if they hurt others, the ability to turn take,” “communication, problem solving,” and to “make friends.” They want a learning environment that prepares their child for kindergarten, builds on their child’s strengths, and celebrates their child’s successes.

Parents say a preschool should provide “routine and structure” and have flexible, accommodating staff. They want a place where “neurodiverse children are welcomed,” that “understand[s] behavior is communication,” and is “a community that embraces...challenges and learns from them.” Parents want teachers that love their child “...through the hard days and easy days, celebrating their differences, and finding creative ways to include them in the fabric of the community at the school.” A school that “honored...rights to equal access and followed the law.”

Parents want their child to be included but may not be able to challenge the systemic oppression their child with a disability faces in educational settings. The parent role is critical for advocacy and inclusion. Participants shared they appreciated being asked to share their thoughts and experiences to shape Preschool for All for other students and said they had never been asked to provide input before. Find more feedback from parents, collected through survey by NWDS, in the resource [Ten Tips for General and Special Education Teachers, and Parents for Inclusive Equitable Schools During COVID and Beyond](#).

