

# CITY OF PALO ALTO FAMILY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2019

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY LEARNINGS



Prepared for:

The City of Palo Alto

The Palo Alto Advisory Committee on Early Care and Education

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Family Needs Assessment:

The purpose of the assessment was to gather data on the current state of families with young children and understand the best practices and opportunities for improving Palo Alto as a great place for families to live and raise children.

Four research questions form the foundation of this work:

**Quality of Life in Palo Alto:** How are families with children ages birth through 12 doing in Palo Alto, how secure do they feel financially, how much of their time is devoted to family life, and what stressors do they face in their daily lives?

**The Early Care and Education (ECE) Landscape:** What challenges do early care and education professionals face in Palo Alto, how can the community support this work, and which best practices are being implemented to recruit and retain quality teachers?

**Access & Inclusion in the Palo Alto Community:** What are the unique stressors faced by low-income families, immigrant families, and families with children who have special needs?

**Community Services, Resources and Supports:** What is the availability and accessibility of community resources, services and supports?



## DATA GATHERING

18

Key Informant Interviews

41

Interviews with ECE Providers

661

Survey Respondents

3

Focus Groups



# KEY LEARNINGS

"Palo Alto has excellent schools, provides a multitude of recreational activities and enrichment activities, beautiful parks and family activities."

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

## Quality of Life in Palo Alto:

- Survey respondents **appreciate** the education and recreation opportunities, safe neighborhoods, community involvement, connection to other parents, time to spend with family, and access to parks, libraries, and community centers.
- Families are **concerned** about housing costs, work-related stress, lack of family support, and the accessibility of affordable, quality childcare. Additional **stressors** for low and middle-income families and families with children who have special needs include accessing community resources, learning supports, after-school options, and recreational activities:

"Having so many opportunities and resources is a strength but it leads kids to believe that they need to be the best in everything, or at least be doing everything - this hinders the time that families have to spend with each other."

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

## The Early Care & Education Landscape:

- Survey respondents **agree** there are high-quality, convenient childcare options. Primary challenges include long waitlists, program limitations, cost, and parking.
- The biggest **challenge** facing ECE providers is recruitment and retention of teachers. ECE providers also struggle to expand their programs, meet the needs of diverse populations, and manage the high expectations and demands of parents.
- ECE providers identify **best practices** for recruiting and retaining teachers such as offering higher pay and more benefits, mitigating commute time, and partnering with the community to address the high cost of living in Palo Alto and surrounding cities.





# KEY LEARNINGS

"It's hard to fit in, I have to say, from my personal experience. No matter how hard you try to be nice and friendly, there is that culture barrier or language barrier that makes it very hard to fit in."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

## Access & Inclusion in the Palo Alto Community:

- Low and middle income families report potentially **earning too much** to qualify for subsidies for housing, childcare, and recreational after-school and summer activities, **but not enough** to afford these services without a subsidy. Additional challenges include obtaining specialized equipment to participate in sports programs and accessing tutors.
- Immigrant families report **struggling to integrate** into the Palo Alto community due to language and cultural barriers. It may also be challenging to find culturally-sensitive childcare options and join established parent and community networks.
- Families with children who have special needs report **difficulties connecting** with parents of typically-developing children, finding childcare that can accommodate their child's needs, and **accessing** specialized services.

"With a special needs child, you have to spend an incredible amount of effort taking care of things other people don't even have to think of. For example, my child makes an enormous amount of noise, always. Neighbors complain. People call the police. There is just no end to dealing with issues most people don't have to deal with."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

## Community Services, Resources & Supports:

- Survey respondents frequently **access** local parks, libraries, and community centers. They **appreciate** the excellent schools and services that exist in the community to support families and children.
- Finding information about community resources, services, and supports can be **challenging** for families, especially those seeking financially-accessible services or programs that meet the language, cultural, or special needs of their child. Also, finding and accessing medical and mental health services can be prohibitive.

