

Boston Quality Inventory: Preschool Classrooms in Community Programs



**Report Prepared by
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For Boston EQUIP
and the Boston Child Care Alliance**

WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN

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Preface

This study was conducted by a team of researchers, led by Dr. Nancy Marshall and Dr. Joanne Roberts, Work, Families and Children program at the Wellesley Centers for Women. We wish to thank the program directors, teachers and staff who welcomed us into their programs and classrooms, and the many families who participated in this study. We also wish to thank our research staff and colleagues who brought their skills and experience in classrooms to this needs assessment. The research team worked in collaboration with Associated Early Care and Education/Boston EQUIP and the Boston Child Care Alliance in the conduct of this study.¹ The study was funded by an anonymous foundation. However, the findings of this report and the views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of Associated Early Care and Education/Boston EQUIP, the Boston Child Care Alliance or the funder. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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July 25, 2007

¹ For more information about The Boston Early Education Quality Improvement Project (Boston EQUIP), a project of Associated Early Care and Education, please visit their website: <http://www.bostonequip.org/>.

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Executive Summary

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) brought national attention to the achievement gap that exists for children from economically disadvantaged families, different race and ethnic groups and linguistic minority families. The National Governors Association Program for Best Practices recommended that education policies address early childhood education as one way to close the achievement gap.¹ Recent scientific research on brain development, coupled with rising concerns about school achievement, has prompted considerable interest in the ways in which early childhood education can contribute to young children's school success. The existing research from multiple disciplines clearly indicates that early childhood is a critical time for children to develop the foundations that they need, so that all children enter first grade ready to learn.² High quality early childhood programs are related to children's cognitive and school outcomes, especially for children from low-income families.^{3,4,5} High-quality early childhood education has been found to produce lasting gains on achievement tests, and reduced rates of grade retention or placement in special education services.⁶

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) *Early Childhood Program Standards* provide detailed guidelines for preschool programs on curriculum, teaching, physical environment and other key program components.⁷ These NAEYC Standards provide the context for the Boston Quality Inventory, and for our recommendations to close the achievement gap.

The Boston Quality Inventory

This report is based on data collected from 81 preschool classrooms in randomly-selected EEC-licensed programs, including Head Start programs, located in the city of Boston. The Boston Quality Inventory consisted of classroom observations, interviews with classroom teachers, surveys completed by program directors, as well as surveys completed by 465 families with children in the selected classrooms.

Boston currently has a system of mixed delivery of early childhood education, including the BPS Early Childhood programs and community programs. Community programs are an important part of the system, and are available in all neighborhoods of the city. Community programs are administered by a range of organizations. Almost one-in-five of the programs that participated in the Boston Quality Inventory were Head Starts; one-quarter of the programs were part of a multi-site early care and education organization; more than one-third were single-site programs; almost one-fourth of the programs were part of an organization that also provided other services (e.g., YMCAs, CAP agencies). Not-for-profit organizations are the backbone of the community programs; almost three-quarters of the programs were not-for-profits and not religiously affiliated, 5% of the programs were religiously-affiliated not-for-profit programs.

Most of the Boston community programs serving preschoolers offer full-day, full-year early care and education – open 5 days per week and at least 50 weeks a year. A few programs were open 7 days a week. Only 6% were open less than 40 weeks per year and only 7% of programs were open fewer than 6 hours per day. Because most community programs are open full-day and year-round, they provide continuity of early education and care for the children enrolled, and a safe setting for many young children while their parents are at work.

Recommendations

1. Incorporate community programs into Boston's city-wide planning for early education and care.

Boston currently has a system of mixed delivery of early education and care, including the BPS Early Childhood programs and community programs. Community programs are an important part of the system, serving over 12,000 children in center-based and Head Start programs.² Many community programs offer quality early care and education, high levels of family communication and comprehensive services for families.

- Almost half of preschool classrooms met the Good Benchmark on the Curriculum Index, a comprehensive assessment of the curriculum materials, furnishings and space available to each classroom, and of the teacher's ability to use these resources to meet the developmental and educational needs of young children.
- Over half of preschool classrooms in community programs currently have at least one teacher with a BA or higher degree, an important predictor of program quality.
- Community programs offer additional strengths that support children, families and communities. The teaching staff of community programs reflect the race/ethnic and language diversity of the children of Boston, fostering culturally-sensitive education and care, as well as encouraging families' involvement.
- Community programs have high levels of family communication, with 65% of families reporting they talk to their child's teacher every day. Most programs have a lending library of materials for families to use at home, and invite families to field trips and classroom activities. The majority of community programs also include families on their governing or advisory boards and ensure that staff receive professional development in working with families.
- Many community programs offer comprehensive services to families, by program staff or by consultation, including child assessments, physical health screening, mental health services and counseling, family education and family support groups. Some programs also offer early intervention services, on-site social services, language and speech therapy, and physical and occupational therapy. In addition, almost all programs offer these and other services by referral.

2. Bring all community programs up to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards.

The Boston Quality Inventory assessed the quality of preschool classrooms in community programs on a set of indices based on the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards. Almost half of the classrooms (48%) meet the Good Benchmark on the Curriculum Index and one-quarter meet the Good Benchmark on the Instructional Supports Index. However, one-third or more of community programs were rated as Inadequate on the Instructional Supports Index, Literacy Supports Index and the Health and Safety Index. To close the achievement gap, Boston should ensure that all community programs meet the NAEYC Early Childhood Program

² Early Care and Education Capacity 1999-2007. <<http://bostonequip.org/PDF/ECECap9807.pdf>> May 16, 2007.

Standards.

- **NAEYC accreditation.** About 60% of programs were NAEYC accredited and 7% of the programs were currently in the accreditation process. Programs that were NAEYC accredited were less likely to be rated as inadequate, compared to programs that were not accredited. NAEYC accreditation should be supported as an important step in raising programs to the Adequate Benchmark.
- **Teachers with BAs in every classroom.** Over half of observed classrooms had at least one teacher with a BA or more. Classrooms with a BA-level teacher were significantly more likely to meet the Good Benchmarks on the Curriculum, Instructional Supports, Literacy Supports and Emotional and Social Supports Indices. Boston community programs should expand the number of classrooms with BA-level teachers to meet the NAEYC Program Standards requirement that, by 2020, at least 75% of classrooms in an early childhood program have a teacher with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or a related field.³
- **Provide all community preschool classrooms with the materials needed to provide a high-quality early care and education program for all children.** Children in most programs had access to a range of materials, including fine motor materials, dramatic play materials, blocks, math/number materials, nature and science activities and materials, art materials, and sand and water play. However, at least two-thirds of programs did not have the variety of materials that are necessary to offer children the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities, explore with diverse materials and interact with multiple peers. In addition, children in more than half of classrooms did not have access to any musical instruments or musical materials.
- **Improve the safety of public playgrounds.** The NAEYC Standards require fencing or natural barriers for outdoor play areas and well-maintained equipment. One-third of community programs lacked access to safe outdoor space and equipment. Many of these programs did not have their own outdoor space and relied instead on public playgrounds which often lacked adequate fencing or well-maintained equipment, or required young children to walk along busy city streets to reach them. Improving public playgrounds, and providing on-site outdoor space for programs not located near improved playgrounds, would improve the health and safety of community programs.
- **Provide additional professional development opportunities for Boston community program teachers.** The BQI found specific areas where teachers would benefit from additional training. Some of this training may be available through formal education (e.g., BA programs), but even when teachers have a BA degree, additional training has been found to be associated with higher quality.⁸ Areas where specific training is indicated include:
 - **Instructional supports.** In most programs, concept development, quality of

³ NAEYC requires that 75% of teachers in larger programs – those with 4 or more classrooms - have a BA or higher by 2020; NAEYC defines a teacher as the adult with the primary responsibility for the classroom. Therefore, in the Massachusetts context, the NAEYC requirement for teacher education can best be understood as 75% of classrooms in larger programs must have at least one primary teacher with a BA or higher by 2020. (This requirement is being phased in between 2006 and 2020.)

feedback, instructional learning formats and language modeling did not reach the Good Benchmark.

- **Literacy supports.** Most teachers adequately facilitated literacy and language activities in the home through their interactions with parents, read daily to children in a group setting and organized some high quality activities that promoted children's language development. However, only about half of the teachers regularly called attention to the functions and features of print, noted the sounds of letter and words, facilitated children's letter recognition and promoted children's interest in writing.
- **Emotional and social supports.** Most teachers created a positive emotional climate that reflected enthusiasm, enjoyment and respect between teachers and children. Most teachers also avoided an angry or harsh negative emotional tone, and showed sensitivity to children's needs for support and comfort. However, teachers were less likely to consider children's interests, motivations, and points of view. Teachers were also less likely to use effective behavior management that emphasized preventing and redirecting students' negative behavior.
- **Hand-washing and health procedures.** The NAEYC Standards require that staff observe regular hand washing and ensure that children wash their hands before and after meals, and that programs maintain sanitary conditions around diapering and toileting. Three-quarters of classrooms often neglected hand-washing before and after meals. Over half of classrooms did not maintain sanitary conditions around diapering and toileting.

Boston's community programs are valuable participants in Boston's efforts to close the achievement gap. Many community programs offer quality, full-day early education and care programs, with strong family involvement and comprehensive services for families. However, Boston's plans for early childhood education will be strengthened to the extent that all community programs meet the highest professional standards. It is our hope that this report will provide the scientific research base to support Boston's efforts to ensure that all children enter formal schooling ready to learn.

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• "We are not just going to close the achievement gap – we are
• going to prevent it. We will continue to apply the most
• progressive problem-solving and the most unflinching
• commitment to the challenge of educating all of Boston's
• children. Because by opening up their minds, we can open up
• their worlds."
•
• – The Honorable Thomas M. Menino
• State of the City Address. January 9, 2007
•
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Closing the Achievement Gap in Boston

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) brought national attention to the achievement gap that exists for children from economically disadvantaged families, different race and ethnic groups and linguistic minority families. The National Governors Association Program for Best Practices recommended that education policies address early childhood education as one way to close the achievement gap.⁹ Recent scientific research on brain development, coupled with rising concerns about school achievement, has prompted considerable interest in the ways in which early childhood education can contribute to young children's school success. The existing research from multiple disciplines clearly indicates that early childhood is a critical time for children to develop the foundations that they need, so that all children enter first grade ready to learn.¹⁰ High quality early childhood programs are related to children's cognitive and school outcomes, especially for children from low-income families.^{11, 12, 13} High-quality early childhood education has been found to produce lasting gains on achievement tests, and reduced rates of grade retention or placement in special education services.¹⁴

The achievement gap is an issue in Boston. In his 2007 State of the City address, Mayor Menino called for citywide action on preventing the achievement gap. This call to action launched Boston's Birth to Five School Readiness Planning Initiative in March 2007 as a 60-member Action Planning Team (APT). The APT is tasked with creating a ten-year vision and five-year action plan to prevent the achievement gap and promote school readiness. A Parent Action Planning Team (Parent APT) is working in tandem with the APT to create the vision and action plan. Also, a Data and Research Team (DART) has been convened to anticipate and respond to the APT's data and information needs. Their work will run through early 2008. The findings in this report in particular will inform the work of the APT as it strives to ensure that all Boston children arrive at school ready to succeed.

Methods

This report is based on data collected from 81 preschool classrooms in center-based and Head Start programs located in the city of Boston, in the 2006-07 school year. Programs were randomly selected from the licensing list provided by the Department of Early Care and Education. Once a program agreed to participate, a preschool classroom was randomly selected for observation by researchers.

Of the randomly selected programs, 78% agreed to participate and were visited by researchers from the study. For each classroom, we collected four types of data: [1] observations of the classroom on a typical morning; [2] teacher interviews regarding teacher qualifications; [3] family surveys completed by families of the children in the observed classrooms and [4] director surveys. Each of these is described below.

Classroom Observations

The goal of the classroom observation was to assess classroom practices using standardized measures that would provide a picture of the strengths of each classroom, as well as areas needing improvement. The classroom observations used three assessment tools developed specifically for use in preschool classrooms, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R); the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA). The data from these assessments were combined to create five indices, described below.

Classroom observers received extensive training on all measures. Visits were scheduled at times that were not disruptive and on days that were typical of the usual environment for that classroom (i.e., not on a day when a field trip was planned, nor when half the class, or the regular teacher, was out sick). Each observation took 3-4 hours and followed a standardized administration procedure designed to minimize disruption to students, teachers, and other program staff.

ECERS Curriculum and ECERS Health & Safety Indices. For this report, we created two indices from the ECERS measure, based on exploratory factor analysis. *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)*.¹⁵ The ECERS has been widely used for a number of years in the assessment of early childhood education preschool environments. This 37-item scale is a rating of the resources available in an early childhood program, the teachers' use of these resources, and the teachers' interactions with the children. It is comprised of seven subscales that include Space & Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents & Staff.

The ECERS Curriculum Index includes measures of the availability of resources as well as the teacher's behavior. ECERS Curriculum is an average of the subscale scores for Space & Furnishings, Language-Reasoning, Program Structure and Activities, as well as the Interaction scale without the two supervision items.

The ECERS Health & Safety Index is an average of the health items from the ECERS Personal Care Routines scale (meals/snacks, naps, toileting, health behaviors) and the average of the two supervision items from the interactions scale.

Benchmarks. The findings on the ECERS Curriculum and ECERS Health & Safety Indices are reported in terms of benchmarks. In this report, classrooms are said to meet the Inadequate Benchmark if they score below a "3" on an ECERS Index, that is, the classrooms were judged inadequate on one or more of the ECERS components. Classrooms that meet the Adequate Benchmark have scored between a 3 and a 4.5, indicating classrooms that meet or exceed minimal standards on one or more of the ECERS components. Classrooms that meet the Good Benchmark on the ECERS Curriculum Index have earned an average score of 4.5 or higher on the ECERS domains, indicating classrooms that provide a curriculum that meets professional standards for children's growth and development. Classrooms that meet the Good Benchmark on the Health & Safety Index have earned an average score of 4.5 or higher on the ECERS items, indicating classrooms that meet professional standards for protecting children's health and safety.

CLASS Emotional and Social Support and Instructional Support Indices. Based on the guidelines of the developers of the CLASS, we created two indices – Emotional and Social Support and Instructional Support – from the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*.¹⁶ The CLASS is an observational instrument developed to assess classroom quality in preschool through third grade classrooms. The CLASS scores are based solely on *interactions* between teachers and children. The presence of materials and the physical environment are not considered in scoring.

The CLASS looks specifically at the emotional and instructional tone of the classroom using nine dimensions – Positive Climate (reflects enthusiasm, enjoyment and respect between teachers and children); Negative Climate (degree to which the classroom has a negative emotional tone as indicated by anger or harshness); Teacher Sensitivity (the degree to which teachers offer support and comfort to children); Regard for the Student Perspective (the degree

to which teachers' interactions and classroom activities consider students' interests, motivations, and points of view); Behavior Management (considers teachers' abilities to prevent and redirect negative behavior); Productivity (examines teachers' abilities to use instructional time and routines as learning opportunities); Concept Development (explores the strategies used to promote reasoning skills and creativity through problem-solving and classroom instruction); Instructional Learning Format (extent to which available activities, presentations, groupings and range of materials encourages children's engagement); and Quality Of Feedback (focuses on the quality of verbal feedback offered to children regarding their interactions, comment and ideas).

The Emotional and Social Support Index includes the CLASS dimensions of Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard For The Student Perspective And Behavior Management. **The Instructional Support Index** includes CLASS dimensions of Productivity, Instructional Learning Formats, Concept Development, Quality Of Feedback And Language Modeling.

Benchmarks. The findings on the CLASS Emotional and Social Support and Instructional Support Indices are also reported in benchmarks. In this report, classrooms are said to meet the Inadequate Benchmark on the CLASS composites if they score below a "3" on a CLASS Index, that is, there are few, if any, indicators in the classroom of a positive emotional climate or positive instructional supports. Classrooms that meet the Adequate Benchmark have scored between a 3 and a 5, indicating there are some indicators of a positive emotional climate or positive instructional supports. Classrooms that meet the Good Benchmark have earned an average score of 5 or higher on the CLASS, indicating that there are many indicators of a positive emotional climate or positive instructional supports.

SELA Literacy Index. For this report, we created a composite from *The Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA)*.¹⁷ The SELA was designed to assess early childhood classroom practices related to the development of literacy skills. The scale is comprised of 19 items on 7 dimensions: the literate environment, language development, knowledge of print/book concepts, phonological awareness, letters and words, parent involvement and developmentally appropriate practices. Two additional items address strategies used for bilingual and non-English speaking children and are scored if at least 20 percent of the children in the classroom speak a language other than English in their home.

The SELA Literacy Index consists of five of the SELA scales, The Literate Environment, Language Development, Knowledge of Print/Book Concepts, Phonological Awareness and Letters & Words.

Benchmarks. The findings on the SELA Literacy Index are also reported in benchmarks. In this report, classrooms are said to meet the Inadequate Benchmark on the SELA Literacy Index if they score below a "2.5" on the SELA Literacy Index, that is, the classroom does not consistently provide at least some evidence of literacy support on all five of the SELA domains. Classrooms that meet the Adequate Benchmark have scored between a 2.5 and a 4, on average, indicating consistent evidence of some use of literacy supports in each domain. Classrooms that meet the Good Benchmark have earned an average score of 4 or higher on the SELA Index, indicating strong evidence of literacy supports on at least half of the domains.

Comparing Quality Measures. These measures have in common their relation to children's learning and development. However, they differ in their focus. The CLASS scores are based solely on *interactions* between teachers and children. The presence of materials, the physical

environment or the safety of the space are not considered in scoring the CLASS. The SELA is designed to assess early childhood classroom practices related to the development of literacy skills, but does not address other domains. The ECERS is designed to assess multiple domains of quality that have been linked to student success, but it does not assess specific domains in as much detail as do the SELA or the CLASS. Together, these measures provide a comprehensive, in-depth assessment of the quality of classrooms.

In addition, each of the composite indices is significantly correlated with the CLASS Student Engagement measure, indicating that, in higher quality classrooms, students are more engaged in the classroom, participating and attending to classroom activities. Pearson Correlations ranged from $r=.59$, $p<.01$ for ECERS Health and Safety Index to $r=.77$, $p<.01$ for Class Emotional and Social Support Index. The Student Engagement dimension is generally considered a student outcome measure.¹⁸

Surveys

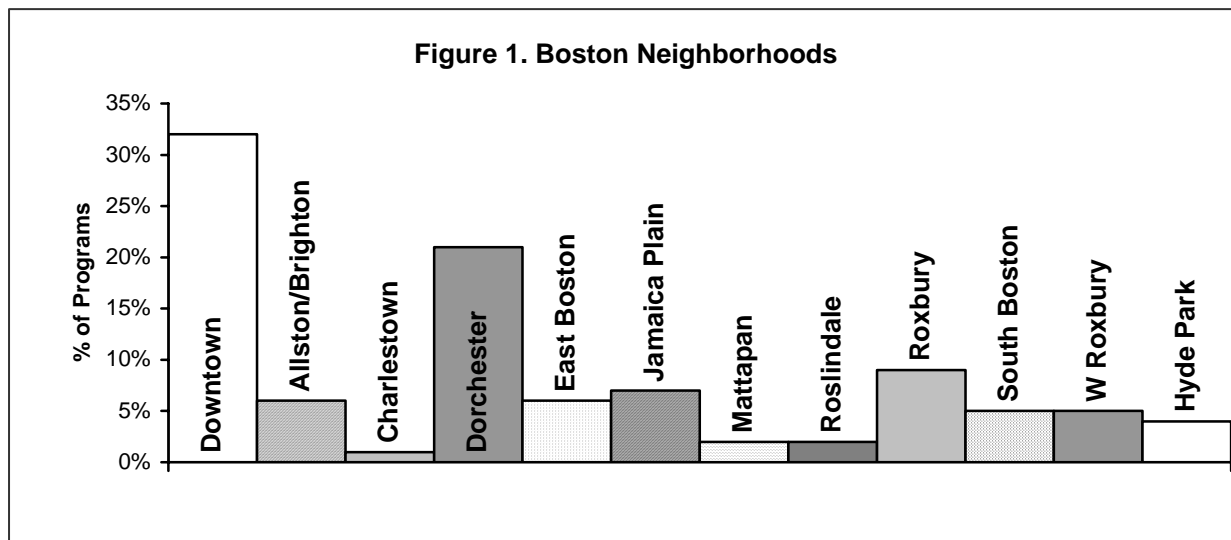
Teacher Interviews. Brief teacher interviews were done with all teachers in the classrooms we observed. Teachers were asked about the enrollment of their classrooms including the gender, ethnic and language breakdowns of children. Teachers were also asked about their own ethnicity, languages spoken, experience in ECE and educational attainment. In addition, teachers were asked about the methods they used to communicate with the families of children in their class. The response rate was 99%.

Director Surveys Directors of observed programs were asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their program, communication with parents and services offered. Specifically, directors were asked to indicate job experience, hours of program operation, program profit status, enrollment, communication strategies used with families and income level of families served. Directors also indicated the types of services offered by their programs and the assessment techniques used to monitor children's developmental progression. Of the 81 directors asked to participate, 89% completed the survey.

Family Surveys. Family surveys were sent home with children and returned in sealed envelopes to a collection site at the program. The family survey offered families an opportunity to rate and comment on their child's current experiences and their reasons for choosing their child's program, as well as provide information about children's experiences at home. Four hundred sixty five (465) families returned surveys, from 60 programs; 74% of the programs, and 48% of families in the observed classrooms in those programs, participated in the family survey.

Description of Programs, Classrooms, Teachers and Families

Program Characteristics. The programs were located in all neighborhoods of Boston. The neighborhood distribution of participating programs is shown in Figure 1.



Almost 18% of programs were Head Start Programs. About one-quarter (24%) of programs were part of a larger child care organization that delivered care at more than one site; 38% of programs were single-site child care programs. Approximately 22% were programs that were part of an organization that provides other services (e.g., YMCAs, CAP agencies).

About 17% of programs were for-profit, independently owned/operated programs. Another 4% of programs were for-profit programs that were part of either a local or a national chain. About 73% of the programs were non-religiously affiliated, not-for-profit programs and 5% were religiously affiliated not-for-profit programs.

Most of the programs in the study offer full-day full-year early care and education. The vast majority of programs were open 5 days per week and 7% were open 7 days per week. About 79% of programs were open at least 50 weeks per year and only 6% were open less than 40 weeks per year. On average, programs were open 9.6 hours a day with a range of 3 to 12 hours. Only 7% of programs were open less than 6 hours per day.

About 60% of programs were NAEYC accredited and 7% of the programs had been in the process of NAEYC self study (prior to accreditation) for less than 2 years when the study took place.

Program Enrollment. Programs varied greatly in their enrollment. Table 1 offers the average enrollment of programs and ranges by age of children. Approximately 65% of programs serving preschoolers did not offer infant care. Of those that offered infant care, only 9% had infants attending part-time. About 40% of programs serving preschoolers did not offer toddler care and only 30% had toddlers in part-time care. Ten percent of preschool programs were part-day programs and did not have full-time preschoolers. About 49% of the programs, including full-day programs, had some preschoolers attending part-time.

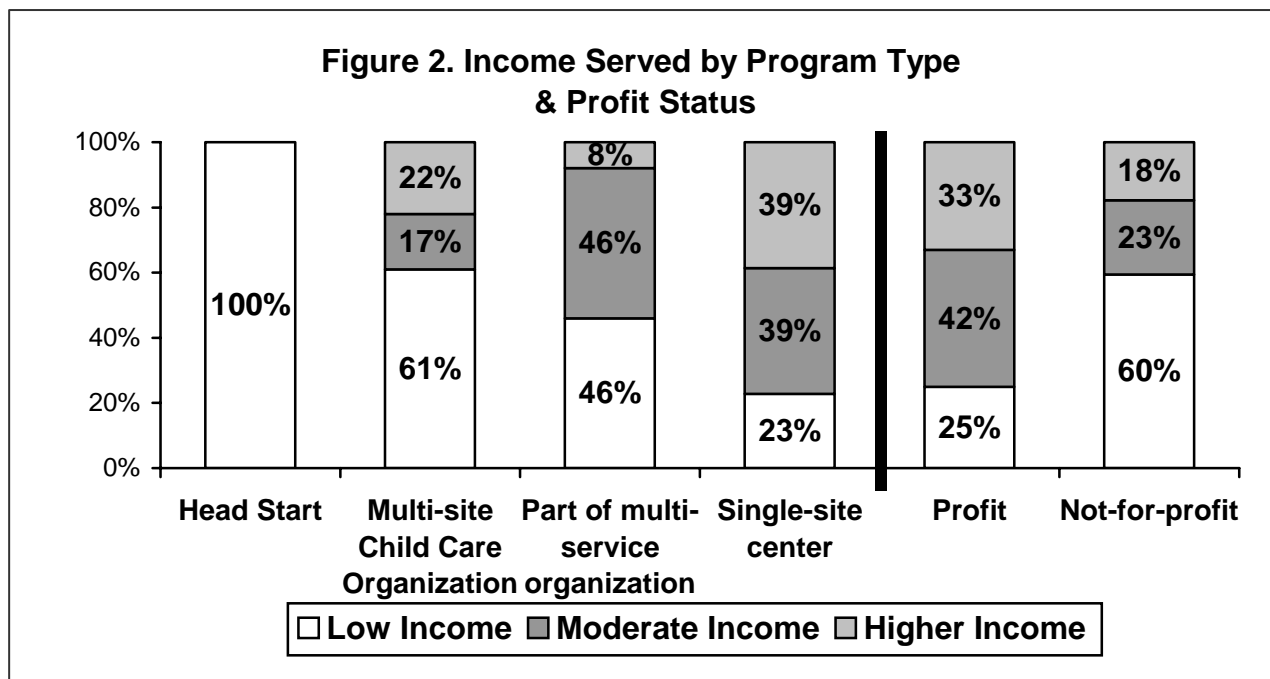
Table 1. Average Enrollment of Program by Age of Children—N=74 programs

Age Group	N Programs with Any	Mean Enrollment ¹	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time Infants	26	11	3	44
Part-time Infants	7	3	1	11
Full-time Toddlers	44	18	3	75
Part-time Toddlers	22	9	2	42
Full-time Preschoolers	67	42	3	180
Part-time Preschoolers	36	32	1	150

¹ mean and minimum enrollment among programs with any enrolled in this age group

Income Served. We asked directors to indicate the income levels of the families served by the program. We then categorized programs into three income groups. Low-income programs were defined as those in which at least 75% of children came from families with incomes below \$35,000/year. Moderate-income programs were defined as those in which at least 75% of children came from families with incomes below \$85,000/year (but not 75% below \$35,000). Higher income programs were those in which at least 50% of children came from families with incomes over \$35,000 (and they do not meet the criteria for low/moderate classification) or 40% or more of the children came from families with incomes over \$85,000. Just over half of the programs (52%) were defined as low-income programs. About 27% of programs were considered moderate income programs and 21% of programs were considered higher income programs.

However, different programs varied in the populations they served (see Figure 2). As might be expected, Head Start programs serve low-income families. In contrast, single-site centers tended to be moderate- or higher income programs, with less than a quarter considered low-income programs. Multi-site child care organizations tended to serve primarily low income children and programs that were part of a larger service organization tended to be categorized as low income or moderate income programs. In addition, for-profit programs were more likely to serve moderate and/or higher income families and less likely to serve low-income families than were not-for-profit programs.



Classroom Enrollment. The enrollment of classrooms in the study ranged from 6 to 31 students (some part time), with an average enrollment of 16 students per classroom. The average observed group size was 14 children present during the observation, with a range of 5 to 22 children. The number of special needs children in each classroom ranged from zero to five children, with an average of just under one special needs child per classroom.

Staffing Patterns. Classrooms were staffed in multiple ways. Fourteen percent of classrooms had only one staff member present during the observation; these were smaller classrooms with an average of 8.8 children present, with a range of 7-11 children. More than one-third (35%) of classrooms had 2 staff members present that were at least EEC teacher qualified. Of these classrooms, 4 had a teacher-director present in the classroom. More than half (52%) of classrooms had one staff member that was EEC teacher qualified, plus an assistant teacher or aide present during the observation.

Teachers. For those individuals with the job title of teacher or head teacher, experience varied significantly. Teachers/head teachers had an average of 6.85 years of working in early care and education or in another child-related job **prior to their current position**, with a range of 0 to 34 years of experience. In addition, teachers had worked at their current program for an average of 5.3 years, with a range of 1 month to 30 years.

NAEYC Standards require that, by 2020, at least 75% of classrooms in an early childhood program have a teacher with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or a related field (this requirement is being phased in between 2006 and 2020).⁴ The classroom observers for the Boston Quality Inventory noted the classroom staff member that was most dominant in the classroom; we refer to this individual as the Primary Teacher. Just over half (52%) of these teachers had earned a BA (43%) or higher (9%). **Put another way, over half of classrooms had at least one teacher with a BA or more.** Approximately one-third (33%) had earned either a CDA (6%) or an Associates Degree (27%); 15% had taken some college courses. Experience working in a child-related field prior to their current position ranged from 0-23 years with an average of 6.7 years. Primary teachers had worked at their current program for an average of 5.7 years with a range of 2 months to 26 years.

The education level of teachers/head teachers varied across programs. Almost half of teachers (48%) had earned a BA or higher. Approximately one-third (33%) of teachers had earned a CDA (7%) or an Associates Degree (26%) and 17% of teachers reported having completed some college course work.

Assistant Teachers. Assistant teachers and aides had 0-15 years of experience working with children prior to their current position. They reported working at their current job an average of just over three years with a range of 1 month to approximately 15 years. Similar to teachers, education varied for assistant teachers and aides. Over one-fifth (23%) of assistant teachers and aides had only a high school diploma or GED. Eighteen percent of assistants and aides had taken some college courses. About one-third (38%) had earned a CDA (15%) or an Associated Degree (23%). Over one-fifth (23%) reported having earned a Bachelor's Degree.

⁴ NAEYC requires that 75% of teachers in larger programs – those with 4 or more classrooms - have a BA or higher by 2020; NAEYC defines a teacher as the adult with the primary responsibility for the classroom. Therefore, in the Massachusetts context, the NAEYC requirement for teacher education can best be understood as 75% of classrooms in larger programs must have at least one primary teacher with a BA or higher by 2020.

Other Staff Characteristics. Directors had been directors of their current programs an average of 9.5 years with a range of 1 month to 35 years. Child care staff were predominantly female. Overall, 16% of the classroom staff were males and 84% were females. Twenty five percent of classrooms had at least one male staff member.

Comparing Staff and Child Diversity. The staff in Boston community programs are very similar in race/ethnicity and language to the children enrolled in those programs. Table 2 shows the teachers' reports of staff and children's race/ethnicity and languages spoken. For children, the teachers reported the primary language spoken in the home. Teachers were able to do this for 97% of the children.

Table 2. Race/ethnicity and Languages of Staff and Children

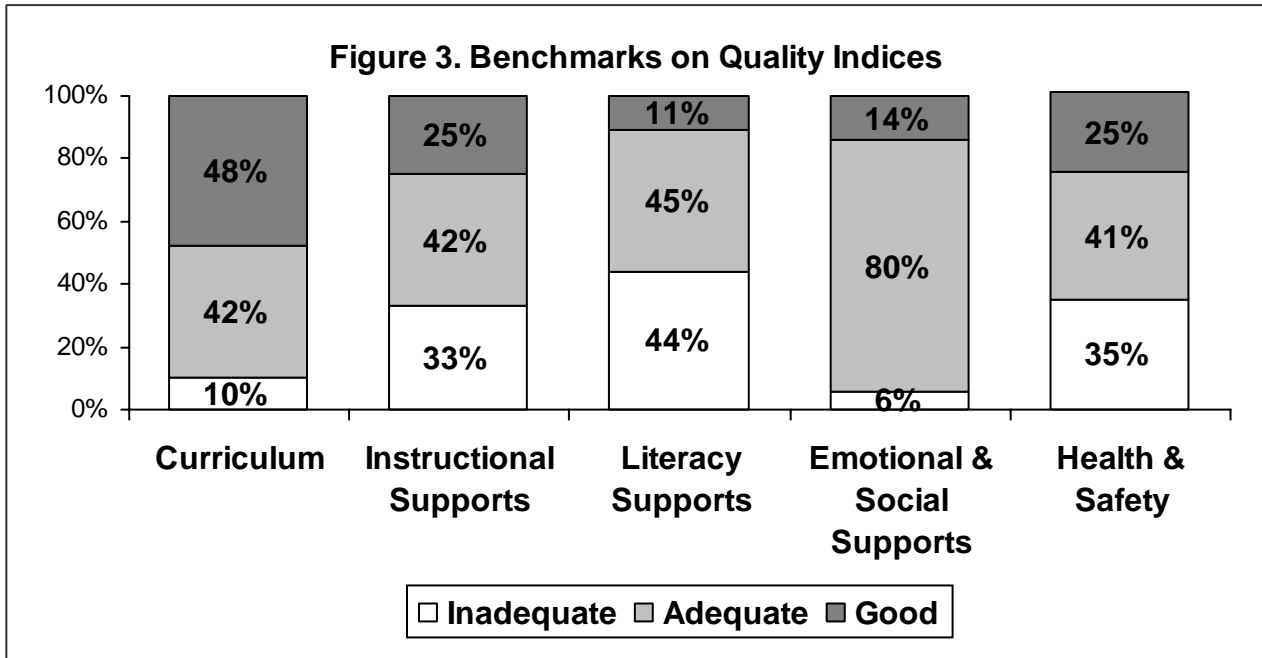
	Staff	Children
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
White/Caucasian	44%	31%
Black/African American	31%	31%
Latino/Hispanic	18%	23%
Asian	5%	4%
Multi-racial/Other	2%	6%
<i>Languages</i>		
English	96%	66% ¹
Spanish	20%	18%
Haitian Creole	8%	3%
Mandarin/Cantonese	5%	4%
Other ²	11%	12%

¹ Percent who are primary English speakers

² Other languages spoken by teachers included 3% French, 5% spoke Portuguese, 5 % spoke Mandarin or Cantonese and 6% spoke another language. Other languages spoken at home by children included Portuguese, French, Cape Verdean, Arabic or Russian.

The Quality of Preschool Classrooms

Figure 3 provides a quick overview of the community programs. We discuss the findings for each of the Indices in turn.



ECERS Curriculum Index

The ECERS Curriculum Index is a comprehensive assessment of the curriculum materials, furnishings and space available to each classroom, and of the teacher’s ability to use these resources to meet the developmental and educational needs of young children.

The ECERS Curriculum Index incorporates the following areas:

Space and Furnishings. The NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards requires facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate learning and development, arguing that:

Well-organized, equipped, and maintained environments support program quality by fostering the learning, comfort, health, and safety of those who use the program.

Program quality is enhanced by also creating a welcoming and accessible setting for children, families, and staff.

The NAEYC Standards also require that the classroom be designed and arranged to accommodate children individually, in small groups, and in a large group. To support children’s activities in small groups or alone, the classroom should provide semiprivate areas where children can play or work alone or with a friend. The classroom should be divided into interest areas or programs that are supplied with materials that support children’s play and learning.

Curriculum Activities. The NAEYC Standards require that programs provide a variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment throughout the day, including materials that support curriculum goals in literacy, math, science, technology, social studies, creative expression and

the arts. In addition, the NAEYC Standards require that teachers select materials in all content areas to stimulate exploration, experimentation, discovery and conceptual learning.

Young children learn about the natural, material and social world through direct exploration. To support this learning, the NAEYC Standards require the availability of materials such as sand, water, art materials, play dough and blocks which allow children to experiment with quantity, size and shape, measurement, comparing, the use of simple tools, and other key concepts in the natural and material world. Dramatic play materials and activities allow children to explore their social world, acting out family and community roles.

Gross-motor activities are important to young children's development of specific gross-motor skills, as well as sensory-motor integration and controlled movement (balance, strength, coordination). Gross-motor activities are also an opportunity to learn physical games with rules and structure and to develop important "habits of the mind" recommended by the BPS Learning Standards, such as courage, perseverance, collaboration and initiative. To support this, the NAEYC Standards require that children have varied opportunities for gross-motor activities and access to gross-motor equipment for activities such as "pulling up, walking, climbing in, on, and over, moving through, around, and under, pushing, pulling and riding."

Almost half of Boston community programs meet the Good Benchmark on Curriculum.

Item Analyses. Most programs (56%) had ample indoor space, good lighting and ventilation and well-maintained sturdy furnishings (93%). Some programs however, lacked access to safe outdoor space and equipment (36%). Many of these programs did not have their own outdoor space and relied instead on public playgrounds which often lacked adequate fencing, well-maintained equipment or required children to walk along busy city streets. About half of the programs (46%) did have adequate space both outdoors and indoors for gross motor play.

Most programs (88%) offered children access to books that were organized in a reading area. Teachers in most programs (96%) were observed to engage in at least one receptive language activity daily. Teachers also communicated regularly with children during free play and group time (78%). The majority of classrooms gave children access to fine motor materials (85%), dramatic play materials (99%), blocks (89%), math/number materials (77%), nature and science activities and materials (78%), art materials for at least one hour daily (89%), sand and water at least 1 hour daily (58%) and materials that encouraged children's communication (67%).

Although classrooms gave children access to multiple material options, materials tended to lack variety and range. Classrooms did not offer children a variety of materials and games for nature and science (74%), a variety of materials for math and number activities (92%), multiple and diverse dramatic play materials (67%), many and varied art materials (83%), many fine motor materials (63%) and multiple materials that exhibited diversity (84%). Although teachers regularly communicated with children, they also tended not to encourage children's reasoning and problem solving (67%). In addition, children in 56% of classrooms did not have access to musical instruments and other music materials.

CLASS Instructional Supports Index

The NAEYC Standards require that teachers use a variety of teaching strategies, ask questions that stimulate children's thinking, join children in learning programs to extend and deepen children's learning, and promote children's engagement and learning by responding to their

need for and interest in practicing emerging skills, by guiding them in acquiring specific skills and by explicitly teaching those skills.

The CLASS Instructional Supports Index assesses teachers' abilities to use instructional time and routines as learning opportunities, the strategies teachers use to promote reasoning skills and creativity through problem-solving and classroom instruction, the extent to which available activities, presentations, groupings and range of materials encourages children's engagement and the quality of verbal feedback teachers offer to children regarding their interactions, comments and ideas.

In the best classrooms, teachers consistently and effectively use multiple methods, materials and modalities to promote children's learning. Teachers focus children's attention on the process of learning rather than emphasizing getting the right answer. Activities focus on developing concepts and teachers use strategies to encourage analysis, reasoning, sequencing and problem solving. Teachers consistently connect concepts to the real world and classroom activities. Teachers also promote children's prediction, experimentation and brainstorming. Teachers frequently engage in feedback loops and conversations with children; praise offers specific information and hints for students struggling with an answer. Teachers have many extended conversations with children, asking many open-ended questions and using rich language with children. Teachers repeat and extend children's responses and encourage children to have extended conversations with one another.

One-quarter of Boston Community programs met the Good Benchmark for instructional supports; another 42% met the Adequate Benchmark.

Item Analyses. Children were consistently engaged in most classrooms during the observation period. However, most programs did not meet the Good benchmark on other instructional supports, including concept development, quality of feedback, instructional learning formats and language modeling.

SELA Literacy Index

During the first five years of life, children's experiences with language and literacy form the foundation for later reading success. Diverse experiences with printed and spoken language, beginning in infancy, strongly affect children's future reading and school success.^{19,20} Children who are at risk for reading difficulties are those who begin elementary school with fewer verbal skills, less phonological awareness, less letter knowledge, and less familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading.²¹ Research has identified strategies for structuring environments and interactions with adults and peers that are effective in promoting children's learning and development in that early childhood settings can do much to prevent future reading difficulties through the provision of literacy-enriched environments.^{22,23} Optimum occasions for language and cognitive development occur when adults' interactions are responsive to children's interests, sensitive to children's signals, and rich in verbal content.^{24, 25,26,27}

The NAEYC Standards for Early Literacy require that children have multiple and varied opportunities to become familiar with print, to write or dictate their ideas daily, and to develop phonological awareness. The NAEYC Standards also require that children learn to identify the parts of books, are read to at least twice a day -- including in small groups or individually -- are given the opportunity to explore a variety of books on their own in quiet areas and to re-tell or act out stories, have writing incorporated into other interest areas such as art or dramatic play, and are given the opportunity to learn and recognize letters and, for kindergarteners, to learn to

read familiar words, sentences, and simple books.

The development of the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) was informed by the NAEYC publication, *Learning to Read and Write*.²⁸ The SELA Literacy Index focuses on best practices in teachers' support of young children's development of literacy skills, including the literate environment, language development, knowledge of print/book concepts, phonological awareness and recognition of letters and words.

The SELA Literacy Index measures: **Knowledge of Print/Book Concepts** (teachers called attention to the functions and features of print daily in a variety of ways, including showing children how to read print (from left to right), identifying the parts of a book, calling attention to and labeling words and letters in the course of daily activities, and using activities to help children recognize and write their own names and others' names); **Phonological Awareness** (Teachers used a variety of activities to draw children's attention to the sounds that they hear in words such as using rhymes and poems, creating word lists and emphasizing the first letters and sounds of words); **Letters and Words** (Teachers used a variety of methods everyday in multiple situations to help children learn to recognize letters, such as reading alphabet books, helping children write their names, playing letter games, and pointing out letters during dictation; Teachers used a variety of methods to encourage children's interest in writing, including taking dictation of a child's story or description of a picture); **The Literate Environment** (classrooms make paper and writing materials available every day, and include writing materials in other interest areas, such as dramatic play); and **Language Development** (classrooms offered multiple language development supports, including frequently encouraging children's conversations, extending children's oral language by adding new words or concepts and elaborating on the child's idea or description, and daily reading to children in a lively, engaging way that invites children's involvement, both in large groups and individually or in small groups; teachers frequently used language that contains rich vocabulary – including some words likely to be new to children, adverbs and adjectives, and explanations of objects, actions or concepts – and complex language structures).

Fewer teachers met the Good benchmark on the SELA Literacy Index than met the Good benchmark on the CLASS Instructional Supports Index (11% compared to 25%).

Item Analyses. Many classrooms offered children adequate levels of choice (73%) and an adequate range of age appropriate activities (89%). Teachers also adequately promoted positive peer interactions (81%). In addition, many teachers adequately facilitated literacy and language activities in the home through their interactions with parents (83%). Teachers were found to be warm (83%), to read daily to children in a group setting (80%) and to organize and facilitate some high quality activities that promoted children's language development (77%). However, only about half of the classrooms (51%) offered adequate levels of print for a purpose and only 40% offered multiple types of literacy props in the dramatic play area. Only about half of the teachers regularly called attention to the functions and features of print (56%), noted the sounds of letter and words (44%), facilitated children's letter recognition (49%) and promoted children's interest in writing (52%).

CLASS Emotional and Social Support Index

Social interaction is necessary for children's linguistic and cognitive development, and social

development is a key to children's success in learning both in school and in later life.^{29,30} Positive warm and nurturing relationships with teachers are associated with a desire to learn to read and provide the foundation for school success.^{31,32}

Interactions with adults in early childhood programs can also foster the development of social skills.^{33,34} The social development of young children can be supported through warm and positive interactions; the quality and stability of children's relationships with adults in early childhood programs appears to be particularly important to children's social and emotional growth.^{35,36} Emotion regulation in children is also fostered by the support of adults in early childhood programs.³⁷

The NAEYC Standards require that the program promote "positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member."

The CLASS Emotional and Social Support Index assesses the extent to which teachers provide the emotional and social support that is essential to children's school success.

The majority of Boston Community preschool teachers were rated as Adequate for the Emotional and Social Support Index, but only 14% met the Good Benchmark.

Item Analyses. Most classrooms in the Boston Quality Inventory created a positive emotional climate that reflected enthusiasm, enjoyment and respect between teachers and children, avoided a negative emotional tone as indicated by anger or harshness, with sensitivity to children's needs for support and comfort. However, classrooms were more likely to fall in the high-mid to high range on regard for the student perspective (consideration of students' interests, motivations, and points of view in interactions and activities) and effective behavior management (greater emphasis on preventing and redirecting students' negative behavior).

Health & Safety Index

Basic standards of health and safety are important to children's learning environments. Because young children are still developing their own health and safety behaviors, early childhood classrooms face additional requirements when protecting the health and safety of young children. The NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards require that the program promote the nutrition and health of children and protect children and staff from illness and injury.

Health Practices. The NAEYC Standards require specific health practices to protect the health of children, including nutritional meals, hand-washing by children and adults after toileting and before meals or snacks, routine cleaning and sanitizing of tables and food preparation areas, and clean bedding for each child for naps. In addition, NAEYC Standards require that nap mats be spaced at least three-feet apart or be separated by a solid barrier, such as shelving.

Location of bathrooms and sinks. To facilitate health and safety, the NAEYC Standards require that toilets, drinking water and hand-washing facilities be in the classroom or within 40 feet of the classroom.

Safety Practices. NAEYC Standards require specific safety practices, including adult supervision of children for children's safety in the classroom and outdoors, fencing or natural barriers for outdoor space to prevent access to streets and to avoid other dangers.

One-quarter of Boston community programs meet the Good Benchmark for Health and Safety and just over 40 percent meet Adequate Standards for Health and Safety.

Item Analyses. Most programs were found to have no major safety problems indoors (77%). Supervision both during gross motor (86%) and indoor activities (80%) was found to be positive in nature and adequate to protect children’s safety. However, most classrooms (77%) did not exercise sanitary practices during mealtimes, with hand washing often neglected by staff or children before and after meals (when eating with hands). Over half (57%) of the classrooms did not maintain sanitary conditions around diapering and toileting.

Access to Quality Programs

Quality early care and education programs for low-income children can help to prepare children for formal schooling and thereby help to close the achievement gap. For early care and education programs to play this role in Boston, low-income children must have equal access to high quality programs. We compared the quality of four groups of programs: centers that serve predominantly low-income families, Head Start programs, centers that serve moderate-income families, and centers that serve higher-income families. We found that centers that served higher-income families were rated higher on quality compared to centers that served low-income families (see Table 3). Ratings for Head Start programs and centers that served moderate-income families generally fell between these two extremes, but were not significantly different from either low-income centers or higher income centers.

Table 3. Comparing Mean Scores on Quality Indices Across Types of Programs

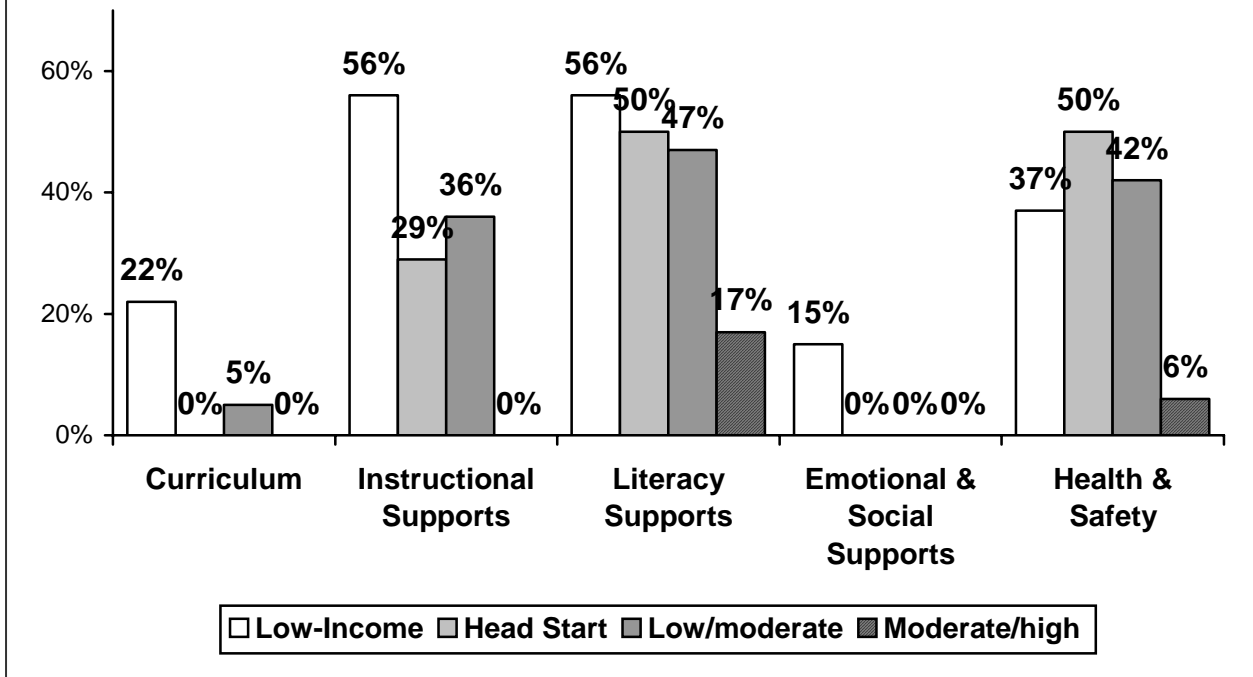
	Curriculum Index	Instructional Support Index	Literacy Support Index	Emotional & Social Support Index	Health & Safety Index
Low Income Centers (N=27)	4.00 ^a	3.39 ^a	2.63 ^a	3.83 ^a	3.52
Head Start Programs (N=14)	4.24	3.72	2.57	4.05	3.18
Moderate Income Centers (N=19)	4.49	4.02	2.64	4.17	3.13 ^b
Higher Income Centers (N=18)	5.13 ^a	4.72 ^a	3.29 ^a	4.54 ^a	4.26 ^b
F-test of significance	4.09 *	3.98 *	3.19 *	3.11 *	2.75 *

a = Higher Income Centers significantly different from Low Income Centers

b = Higher Income Centers significantly different from Moderate Income Centers

Another way to illustrate this is to compare the proportion of classrooms that fail to meet the Adequate benchmark on each of the indices (see Figure 4). Consistent with the data shown in Table 3, low-income centers are most likely to fail to meet the Adequate benchmark on the Curriculum, Instructional Support, Literacy Support and Emotional/Social Support indices.

Figure 4. Percent of Classrooms Failing to Meet the Adequate Benchmark

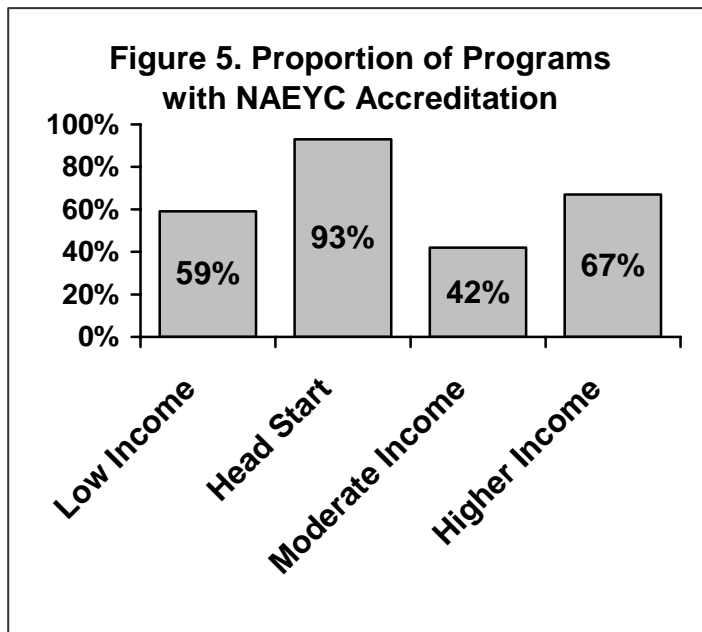


These differences in quality are driven, in part, by the relationship between cost and quality. The Cost and Quality Studies³⁸ documented the fact that Massachusetts community programs, other than Head Start programs, are largely financed by a combination of parents' fees and government subsidies such as vouchers. Programs that served higher income families reported higher revenues than programs that served predominantly low-income families, reflecting the ability of higher income families to pay more of the actual costs of running a quality program. These additional revenues translate into higher salaries for teachers and directors, and to higher quality programs. While non-Head Start programs serving low-income families received more government funds than those serving moderate- or higher-income families, the total revenues of low-income centers were still lower than those for higher income centers, because low-income families can not make up the gap between government funds and the actual costs of quality programs.

Closing the Achievement Gap

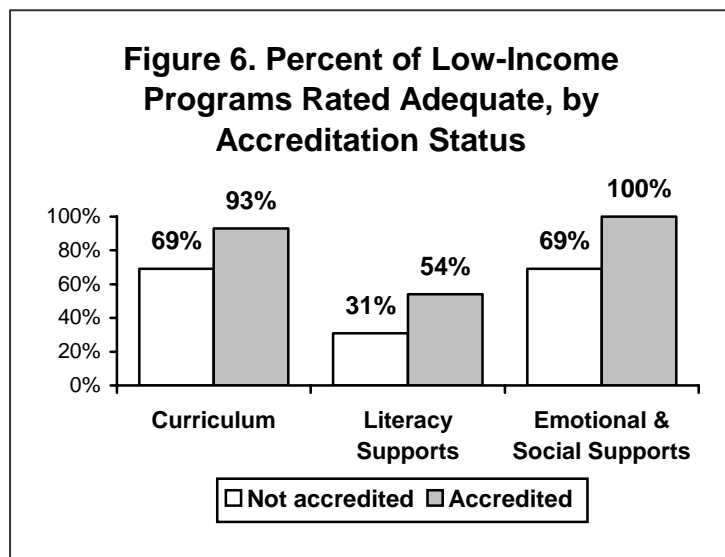
Given these gaps in quality, and the importance of quality early education and care for low-income children, what factors are associated with higher quality? We examined several factors, including NAEYC accreditation, program characteristics and teacher education.

NAEYC Accreditation. Most Head Start programs are accredited or in the accreditation process. More than half of low-income centers are accredited, and two-thirds of higher income centers are accredited. Centers serving moderate income families are least likely to be accredited (see Figure 5). For the sample as a whole, NAEYC accreditation was not significantly associated with differences in quality.



However, NAEYC accreditation was significantly associated with the quality of programs serving low-income children. **When low-income programs were NAEYC accredited, they were more likely to meet the Adequate Benchmark of**

professional practice on selected indices (see Figure 6). Significantly more NAEYC accredited programs serving low-income children were providing adequate classroom practice for fostering children’s development in the area of curriculum, literacy supports and emotional and social supports for children.



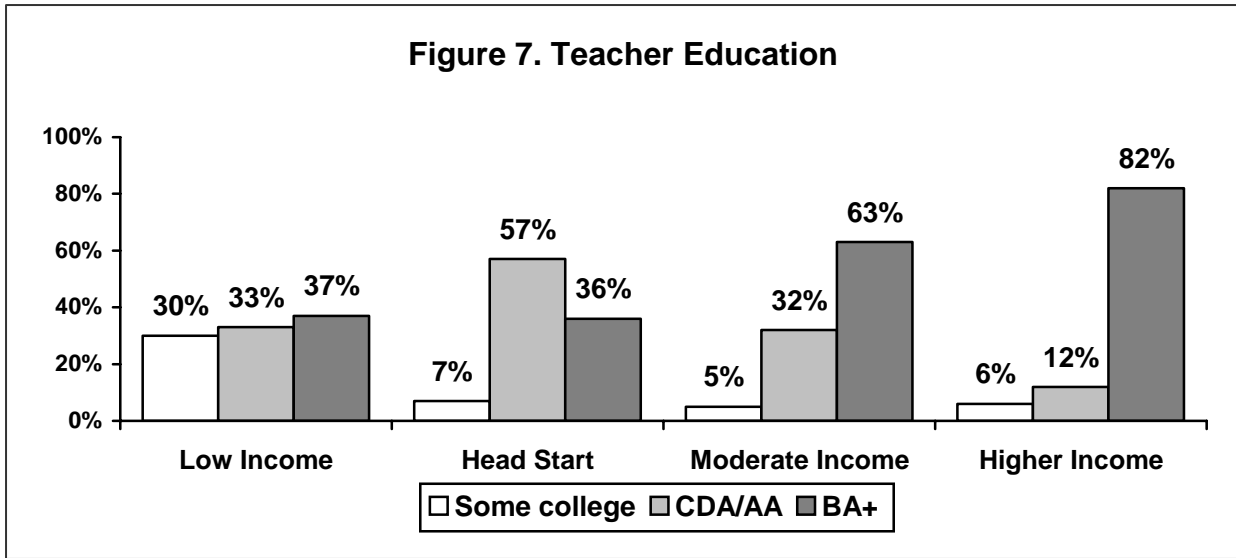
Program Characteristics. Significant differences in quality were not found among the different types of programs (Head Start, multi-site child care organization, single-site program, part of a multi-service organization). In addition, significant differences in quality were not found by the profit status of the program.

Teacher Education. Programs also varied in their teacher qualifications. As Figure 7 shows, over one-third of classrooms in low-income centers and Head Start programs have a teacher with a BA or higher, compared to 63% of moderate income classrooms and

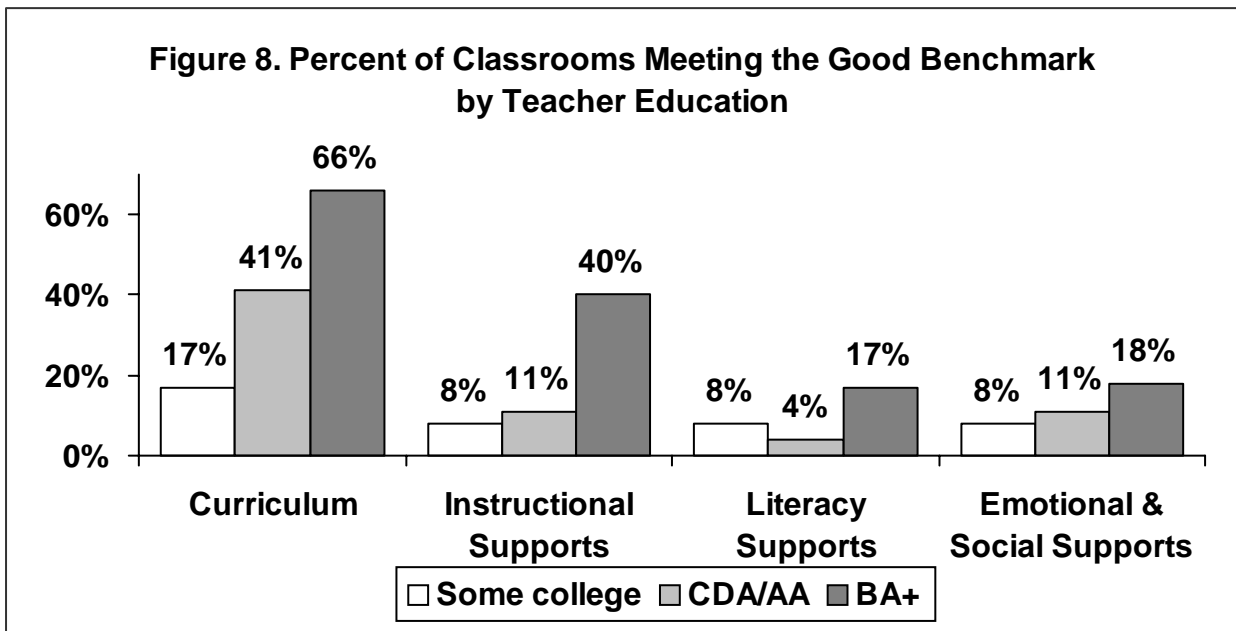
82% of higher income classrooms. While teachers in programs serving moderate or higher income families are more likely to have BAs than those in low-income programs, a significant portion of low-income programs already have BA-level teachers in their preschool classrooms.

The education level of the primary teacher was found to be significantly associated with the quality of programs (see Figure 8). Teacher education was most strongly linked to the Curriculum and Instructional Supports in the classroom. Among classrooms with a teacher with a BA or more, two-thirds met the Good benchmark on Curriculum, and 40% met the Good benchmark on Instructional Supports. Similar patterns were found for Literacy Supports and Emotional and Social Supports, although fewer classrooms overall met the Good benchmark in

these areas. Teacher education was not related to the Health and Safety Index.



Together, these findings suggest that NAEYC accreditation is potentially an important stepping stone that takes programs serving low-income children from providing inadequate quality to providing adequate quality for preschool children. However, to reach the best practice standards represented by the Good benchmarks, preschool classrooms need a teacher with a BA degree.



The Families

The family survey offered families an opportunity to rate and comment on their child's current experiences and their reasons for choosing their child's program, as well as provide information about children's experiences at home. Four hundred sixty five (465) families returned surveys, from 60 different programs.

Family Characteristics

Of the individuals who responded to the survey, 63% were employed full-time, and 16% had a spouse, partner or other adult in the household who was employed full-time. In addition, 43% of the individuals who responded worked a part-time job (for some, this was a second job), and 4% had a spouse, partner or other adult in the household who was employed part-time. Eleven percent (11%) of individuals responding were attending school or a training program, and 2% had a spouse, partner or other adult in the household who was in school or a training program. Three-quarters of the families (78%) live in the city of Boston; the remaining 22% live in surrounding communities.

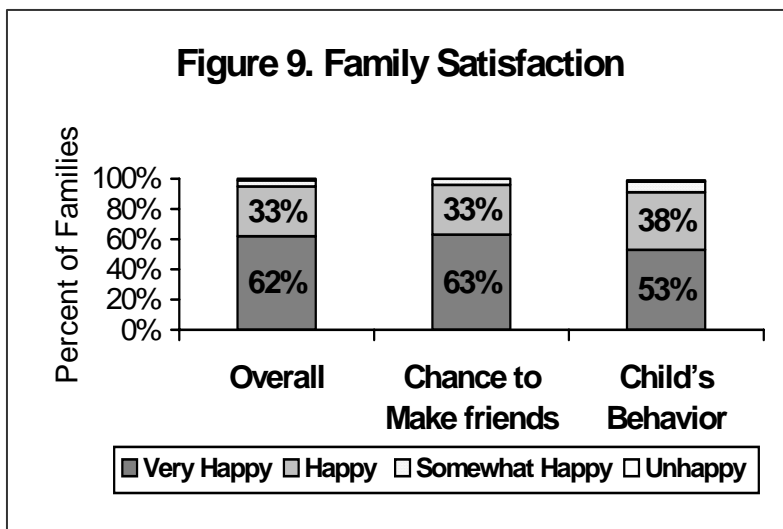
The families represented the race and ethnic diversity of the Boston area, with 27% describing themselves as African American or Black, 11% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 36% as Caucasian or White, 28% as Hispanic or Latino, 1% as Native American or Alaskan Indian, and 2% as Other. English is the most common language spoken at home (64% of families), but 36% of families reported speaking another primary language at home: 17% speak Spanish at home, 3% speak Haitian, 4% speak Mandarin or Cantonese, 2% speak Portuguese. Other families who completed the survey speak Cape Verdean, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, Italian, Korean, or Russian at home.⁵ We also asked families how often they read to their child. One third (37%) read daily, and another third (33%) read almost every day. One in five (21%) read once or twice a week, and 9% read less than once a week or not at all.

Satisfaction with the Program

When asked how happy they were with their child's experience in the program this year, almost two-thirds of parents (62%) reported that they were very happy and another third (33%) said they were happy with their child's experience (see Figure 7). Only 5% of families were only somewhat happy or were unhappy. Families were equally satisfied with their child's opportunities to make friends. Over half of the families were very happy with their child's behavior at the program, and 38% were happy with their behavior. When asked how much they thought their child is learning in the program, about three-quarters (73%) of the families felt their children were learning a lot; another 21% felt their child was learning some. Only 6% felt their child was only learning a little or not at all. The overall picture is one of high levels of family satisfaction with their child's current program.

⁵ These distributions on race/ethnicity and home language are almost identical to teachers' reports, indicating that the family survey reached all communities in the sample.

This is reflected in families' responses to a question about what they would change about their child's current experiences; most families left this blank. Fifteen percent (15%) of the families did make specific recommendations for changes. Nineteen (19) families (4% of all families) wanted more academic learning, 10 (2%) families wanted more recreation time, field trips or better outdoor space, and nine (2%) families wanted more social skill development. Four families wanted better hours or program administration. In addition, more than one family (i.e., 2 or 3 families) said they wanted lower cost, more experienced staff, lower staff turnover, a range of ages in one classroom, smaller class sizes, more nutritious food, and better transportation options.



We also asked families about their experiences with the program. Almost two-thirds of families (61%) reported they were very happy; another third (32%) said they were happy, 6% were somewhat happy, and 4 families (1%) were unhappy with their experiences with the program.

Family Involvement and Communication

Parent involvement and communication with educational providers has been found to be a critical component to children's school success.³⁹ Approximately 35% of programs said they had someone working part-time on family engagement activities. About 17% of programs said that they had a designated an individual to coordinate family engagement full-time. Almost half of the programs (46%) reported that they relied on classroom staff to facilitate family engagement activities.

Preschool teachers reported that they talked to the parents of children enrolled in their class with great frequency. Approximately 53% of teachers report talking to parents of children in their class everyday and 33% report talking to parents almost every day. About 10% of teachers reported talking to parents once or twice a week and 3% said they talked to parents once or twice a month. Only one program reported talking to parents only a few times a year.

Table 4 presents the strategies that programs and observed classrooms are using to encourage family engagement, communication or involvement. As table 4 indicates, programs and teachers are using multiple methods of communication. Few teachers however, send emails to parents, use parent-teacher notebooks or have regular parent volunteers in their classrooms. Discrepancies do exist in the director and teacher reports of the use of parent-teacher notebooks and parent volunteers. Directors were asked to answer questions based on the program in general. Results imply that parent volunteers and the use parent-teacher notebooks may be more prominent in classrooms serving non-preschool aged children. The vast majority of program offer teacher-parent conferences (96%). For over half of the programs (54%) conferences take place twice a year. Approximately 19% of programs hold teacher parent conference three times a year and 9 % have teacher parent conferences more than 3 times per

year.

Table 4. Percent of programs and classrooms using strategies to encourage family engagement and communication

Method	Offered by Program	Used in Observed Classroom
Program Supports for Family Involvement		
Family Handbook with information about program	100%	
Family visits to program prior to enrolling	99%	
Family message boards	90%	
Families sit on program governing or advisory board	60%	
Family workshops on parenting, child issues	77%	
Professional development for staff related to working with families	94%	
Lending library or materials for families to use at home	85%	
Teacher-suggested home activities	92%	89%
Other (specify)	17%	10%
Teacher-Family Communication		
Informal conversations at drop off or pick up times		99%
Phone calls to home or work		91%
Informal notes home		90%
E-mail		17%
Parent-teacher Notebooks	52%	23%
Teacher-parent conferences	97%	96%
Program open house or parent night	90%	90%
Parent Newsletters	85%	91%
Parents invited to field trips	93%	85%
Parents invited to classroom activities	95%	95%
Parents regularly volunteer in child's classroom	63%	32%

Directors noted that they faced some challenges in facilitating family involvement (see Table 5). One of the strengths of community-based preschool programs is the diversity of the staff and teachers, which often reflect the neighborhood where the program is located and the children who attend the program. As can be seen in Table 5, few directors identified language barriers or cultural differences as challenges to family involvement. Rather, the challenges reflected the busy lives of families. Almost one-third of directors believed that families being too busy with work and family responsibilities was a considerable or extreme challenge to encouraging parent involvement. Most of the children in the study came from families in which parents are working at least part time. This can limited the ability of families to be involved in program activities. Consistent with family availability and working families, just over one-quarter of the directors identified difficulty getting families to program meeting and events, as well as family availability being limited to after program operating hours, as considerable or extreme challenges.

Table 5 Considerable or Extreme Challenges to Encouraging Family Involvement
(% of Directors reporting)

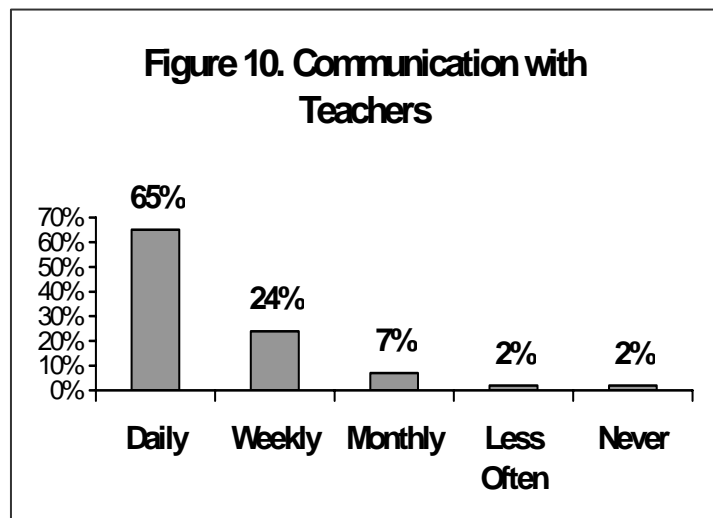
Challenges	Percent
Families are too busy with work and family responsibilities	32%
Difficulty getting families to program meetings or events	26%
Families can only be reached after program hours	26%
Families having difficulty reading	18%
Program lacks financial resources for family programs	16%
Families not having phone numbers where they can be reached during the day	15%
Language barriers between families and staff	11%
Families not dropping off or picking up children limiting contact	8%
Families having limited time to talk with teachers during drop off or pick up time	8%
Program staff have limited time to talk with families at drop off and pick up	6%
Cultural differences between families and program serves as barriers	3%
Program staff lack time to work with families	0%

Parent involvement in children’s literacy development. The SELA observation measure includes two items assessing the efforts of the teachers and the schools to involve parents in supporting their children’s literacy development. Over a third of teachers (35%) meet the Good Benchmark for regular communication with parents to promote home-based literacy activities. These teachers regularly suggested home-based literacy activities and communicated with parents through a variety of means such as newsletters and informal conversations during drop-off and pick up. They also encouraged parents to participate in classroom activities and shared information about individual children’s literacy interests and skills with parents. About one in six (17%) of the classrooms met the Good Benchmark on offering families a variety of special activities and supports to encourage children’s literacy development throughout the year. While most classrooms did not meet the Good Benchmarks, over half met the Adequate Benchmark on these items.

Teacher/Child Relationship. When asked about the relationship between their child and his/her teacher, almost two-thirds of families (66%) reported that it is very close and loving; another 27% reported that the relationship was positive, though not really close. Twenty families (4%) reported the relationship was “business-like.” Eleven families, or 2%, reported they did not know.

When we asked families whether their child’s teacher seemed happy to have their child in the class, 83% said the teacher seemed very happy, 17% said the teacher seemed positive but not overly happy, and 2 families (less than 1%) said the teacher did not seem happy to have their child in the class. Overall, children’s relationships with their teachers seem very positive.

Communication with Child’s Teacher. Direct communication between families and teachers supports both the child’s experience in the classroom, and the families’



knowledge of and trust in the program. Effective communication allows families and teachers to each provide the child with an environment that supports learning and growth. We asked families how often they talked to their child's teacher. Almost two-thirds of families (65%) reported that they talked to their child's teacher almost every day, and another 24% talk to the teacher at least once a week. Only 9% talked to their child's teacher less than one a week.

Choosing a Preschool Program

The majority of families (60%) heard about their child's preschool program from a friend, neighbor or other parent. Families also learned about programs from employers or their school programs (either employer supported, or recommended – 9%); because the programs were located in their neighborhoods or near work (8%), from their child's previous child care program (7%) or family child care provider (5%), by referral from the Department of Transitional Assistance (3%) or from a child care referral agency or health care provider (3%); or by searching for programs on the internet (4%). While 7% of families said they learned about programs in the newspaper, these families also said that they learned about the program from friends, neighbors or child care providers, suggesting newspaper ads were not used as the only source of information.

When asked why they wanted their child to attend a preschool program, the overwhelming majority (80%) of families surveyed reported that it was to help prepare them for school. Families also reported other benefits, including having other children to play with (48%), needing care while the adults were at work or school (53%) or time away from the child (6%), or needing services for a child with special needs (2%).⁶

When asked why they chose this particular program instead of another, almost half of families (42%-45%) said it was because the program had the best quality, was safe, and they trusted the program more than other programs (see Table 5). Over one-third (36%) of families chose their child's program because it involved families, and about one-quarter (24%) chose it because they were offered	Table 6. Reasons for Choosing this Program¹	Percent of families
	The program is safe	45%
	This program has the best quality	43%
	You trust this program more than other programs	42%
	The program involves families	36%
	Financial aid, lower tuition, help paying	24%
	Sibling already at program	15%
	Other programs cost too much	14%
	The program provides other services to families	10%
	No spaces in other programs	9%
	The program provides special needs services	6%
	Other programs don't provide transportation	1%
	Other	17%
	¹ Families could check more than one reason	

help paying tuition. One in ten families chose the program because it offered other services to families and 6% chose it because it provided special needs services.

Transportation to the Program

Almost two out of three (65%) children are driven to the program; 16% walk to the program and

⁶ Families could check more than one reason for this question.

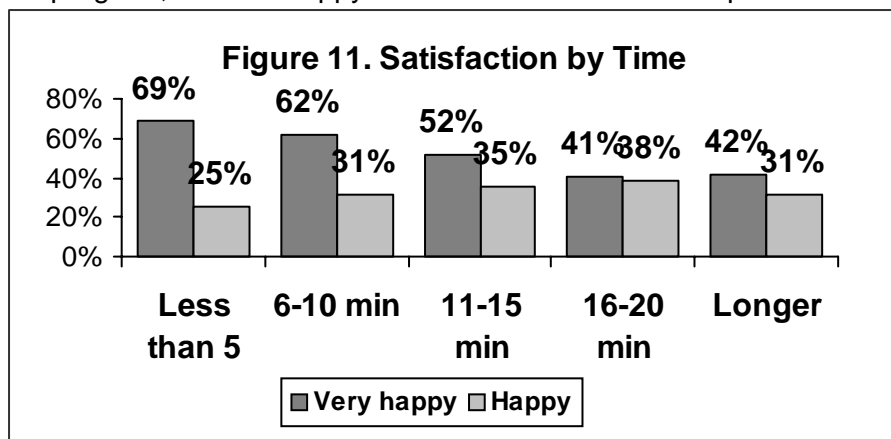
14% travel by T (see Table 7). Only 6% of children travel by program bus. Two in five children spend 10 minutes or less traveling to their program, and almost two-thirds (64%) arrive within 15 minutes. The amount of time it takes for children to get to the program varied with the type of transportation. Walkers were more likely than others to arrive within 15 minutes (85% of walkers got to the program within 15 minutes). Children who traveled by T often took longer, with 42% of children traveling more than 20 minutes by T.

Table 7. Travel Time by Method of Travel

Time to Get to Program:	Method of Travel			
	Program Bus	T	Car	Walk
Under 5 minutes	8%	3%	16%	28%
6-10 minutes	12%	3%	32%	28%
11-15 minutes	44%	17%	21%	29%
16-20 minutes	24%	34%	19%	11%
Longer than 20 min	12%	42%	13%	4%
Number of children	25	64	301	72

Satisfaction with Transportation to the Program.

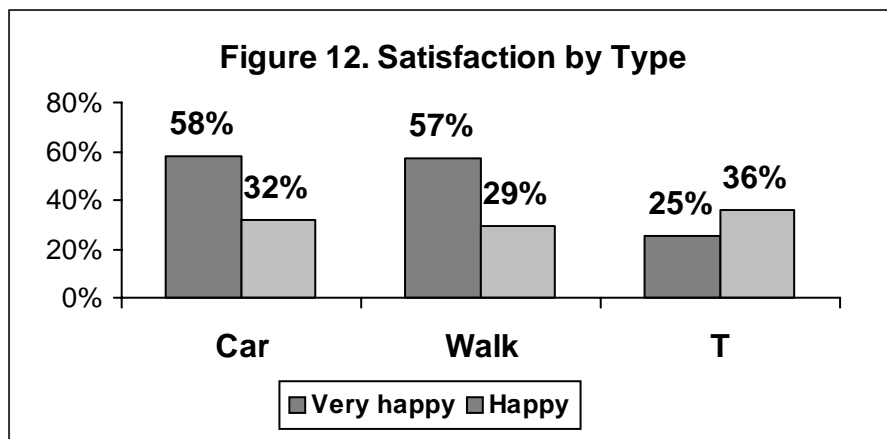
How happy families were with transportation depended on how long it took their children and on the type of transportation. Not surprisingly, the longer it took children to get to the program, the less happy families were with the transportation.



The method of transportation also mattered. The majority of families who traveled by car or program bus (data not shown), or walked to the program, were happy or very happy with transportation (90%, 96% and 86%, respectively). In contrast, only 61% of

families who traveled by T were happy or very happy with transportation.

Putting these two patterns together, it is clear that some families would welcome the option of a program bus. However, the absolute numbers in any one program would be small; only 5% of the families who completed the surveys used the T and were dissatisfied with doing so.



Comprehensive Services

Community programs often offer additional services for families. As noted above, one in ten families said that these services were a factor in their choice of program. Directors were asked about the services their programs offered children and families. Table 8 indicates the services offered by program and who provided the service.

Most programs are conducting their own cognitive, developmental and social-emotional assessments and screenings on children. Programs however, frequently do not offer services themselves and instead refer families and children to service providers outside of the program staff. Although programs are conducting developmental assessment for children, less than one-quarter are conducting physical health screening for children. Almost half the programs offer families education and workshops but tend to refer parents to parental support groups, mental health services and assistance with social services.

When asked specifically about the types of child assessment programs are using, directors reported using both informal and formal methods of assessment. The vast majority of programs were using teacher observations (96%) and classroom observation by staff other than the teacher (69%). In addition, most programs (88%) conducted individual assessments of children by teachers of program staff and 46% of programs used outside professionals to conduct child assessments. In addition, 82% of programs reported using conferences with families as an additional means of assessment.

Table 8. Proportion of Programs Offering Specific Services

Service	Offered by Program Staff	Offered by Consultation	Offered by Referral	Not available at program
Language & speech therapy	5%	26%	80%	1%
Social-emotional assessment	59%	18%	43%	3%
Cognitive & development assessment	54%	21%	47%	3%
Physical & occupational therapy	3%	17%	80%	7%
Mental health services & counseling	12%	24%	69%	10%
Early intervention services	4%	18%	73%	12%
Physical health screening	22%	21%	52%	14%
Family education (e.g., training, workshops)	49%	15%	36%	18%
Family support groups	26%	11%	50%	23%
Social services (e.g., WIC)	22%	1%	54%	24%
Transportation to & from program	7%	9%	8%	73%

When asked what additional services programs would like to offer families, most programs indicated that they are content with the level of service currently being offered. Eight percent of

programs however, did indicate that they would like to offer more parent education and workshops to families.

Services for Children with Special Needs

The family survey asked families whether their child had special needs and their satisfaction with the program for their special needs child.

Twenty eight families (6%) who responded to the family survey reported that they had a child with special needs. The majority of these families (23 families, 82% of families with a special needs child) reported that they felt that their child's program was the best place for their child; two families (7%) reported that it was not.

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