EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early and School-Age Care in Santa Monica

Current System, Policy Options, and Recommendations

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BACKGROUND

The landscape of early learning and out-of-school-time programs in the City of Santa Monica is complex, with numerous providers and funding streams. This complexity reflects its evolution in response to changes in federal, state, and local priorities and initiatives. Future shifts in funding levels, program auspices, and other features are likely. With our growing understanding of the importance of high-quality early learning experiences and the value of the extended day for out-of-school-time learning, it is imperative to ensure that child care—and the public funds that support it—meet the needs of families in the city and provide opportunities for optimal growth and development for the children who use these services.

This is a particularly opportune time for the city to examine early and school-age care. Building upon a partnership initiated in 2010 to address youth violence and mental health, the City of Santa Monica, Santa Monica–Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD), Santa Monica College, and other community partners have formed the Santa Monica Cradle to Career (SMC2C) Working Group. SMC2C's efforts, based in a collective impact framework, recognize that youth well-being must be examined from many angles and that the city and other stakeholders have an opportunity and a challenge to provide its children and youth with opportunities for healthy growth and development starting at birth and continuing through the school-age years. The SMC2C initiative recognizes that while individual agencies and institutions do their best to meet the needs of families in the community, systems can become complex, fragmented, and challenging for families to navigate. Thus, SMC2C aims to address the fragmentation through unified goals, shared information, and a common commitment to serving the diverse needs of children and youth.

In light of the SMC2C initiative, the goal of this report was to provide the City of Santa Monica and SMMUSD with the data and analysis required to deliver effective and sustainable early and school-age care (ESAC) programs through effective use of available sources of public funding and existing provider infrastructure in the public and private sectors. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

- How will state (and federal) budget and policy changes affect the system of infant and toddler care, preschool and prekindergarten programs, and school-age programs in the City of Santa Monica in terms of access, quality, effectiveness, and sustainability?
- How can new funding sources be integrated with existing funding streams, including subsidy and fee structures, to simplify and sustain the mix of programs and services required to meet the needs of families in the city?
- How can the current system of early care and learning programs and school-age programs be improved or redesigned to address gaps in service, raise quality, streamline service delivery, and strengthen and reconfigure the funding structure?

This is a particularly opportune time for the city to examine early and school-age care.

In addressing these questions, we focused on two age groups of children and their associated care: (1) infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children and the *early care and education (ECE) programs* that serve them in home and center settings prior to kindergarten entry; and (2) school-age children and youth, from kindergarten through high school, and the *out-of-school-time (OST) programs* they attend in the hours before or after the school day, on weekends, and on school breaks. Collectively, these programs constitute *ESAC.* We focused on ESAC programs that operate within Santa Monica;

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programs within SMMUSD that operate in Malibu were not included. In addition, our central focus is on licensed providers, both small and large family child care homes (FCCHs) and centers, or license-exempt school-age programs. For the most part, we do not address license-exempt family, friend, and neighbor care or private enrichment classes.

STUDY FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

Our study was guided by a framework for provision of ESAC in Santa Monica that considers (1) the federal, state, and local policy and funding environment; (2) ESAC delivery from a supply perspective, focusing on providers in the public and private sectors; and (3) the demand perspective, assessing families' needs for and experience with ESAC services. It also considers the views and concerns of other key stakeholders, including the City of Santa Monica, SMMUSD, resource and referral agencies, and training and workforce development providers, among others. Key topics of interest for ESAC include four interrelated themes that form the building blocks for our analysis:

- *Access and participation:* which children are eligible to participate in the array of programs and the resulting patterns of participation.
- *Quality of care:* the nature of the ECE and OST programs, the adequacy of those services for providing safe and developmentally appropriate care, and the opportunities for innovative programming.

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- *Service delivery profile:* the mix of providers in the public and private sectors and the vehicles for providing publicly funded subsidies for care, whether through direct provision by government agencies, by contracts or grants to service providers, or by vouchers provided to families that can be used to pay for care.
- *Financing:* the amounts and sustainability of public and private sources of funds used to pay for ESAC, including federal, state, and local sources on the public side and private sources that include families, employers, and community-based organizations (CBOs).

We employed a variety of methods to address the research and policy questions, including document reviews and identification of best practice models, key informant interviews, focus groups, analysis of existing data, and the collection of new data. The following components informed our work:

- To gain perspective on ESAC needs and gaps, we assembled publicly available information on the city's demographics. We analyzed parent survey data collected by the city and SMMUSD that addressed project-relevant topics. We also conducted five focus groups with Santa Monica parents to elicit information about care selection, access, and concerns.
- To develop a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of ESAC, we constructed an inventory of local programs, drawing our information from materials provided by the city, SMMUSD, and other partners, and from a series of interviews with providers in the community. We also collected cost data from a small sample of ESAC providers to better understand the cost of care in the community.
- To learn about the perspective of other key stakeholders in the community regarding ESAC, we extended our interviews about the ESAC system to include parents as well as representatives from a broad range of organizations, such as the local community college and the Parent-Teacher Association.
- To sharpen our understanding of the funding and policy environment, we relied on these interviews with providers and stakeholders, as well as a review of relevant documents (e.g., previous reports on the subject by local stakeholders, legislative summaries). We also identified a number of service delivery approaches and strategies for sustainable funding operating in other communities in California and in other states to inform our recommendations (best practices models).

> There is a range of economic and social circumstances for students in the public schools. For instance, about 30 percent of SMMUSD students are classified as economically disadvantaged.

In the remainder of this summary, we first highlight important demographic information and other contextual data that inform our understanding of ESAC in Santa Monica. We then turn to a summary of the key ESAC issues that emerged from the study activities. In addition, we briefly highlight the strategies. Finally, we discuss the policy options and recommendations for responding to those issues. For these final two sections, we organize the presentation around the four key themes associated with the study questions: access and participation, quality of care, service delivery, and financing.

CONTEXT FOR ESAC IN SANTA MONICA

As of 2011, the city of Santa Monica had a population of nearly 12,000 children under age 18, about 13 percent of the city's total population of just over 90,000 residents. Approximately 3,600 children were under age 5, while the remaining children were of school age. Each annual birth cohort consists of about 700 children.

Compared with the state of California or Los Angeles County, the city's population is somewhat less diverse and relatively more affluent. For example, nearly seven of ten city residents are non-Hispanic white, compared with about three of ten countywide, and a smaller share are foreign-born (22 percent versus 35 percent). Median income for families in Santa Monica with children under 18 stands at nearly $107,000, higher than the county or state figures (about $51,000 and $59,000, respectively). Likewise, the overall poverty rate (12 percent) and child poverty rate (6 percent) are lower than the comparable county and state figures. The child poverty rate implies that about 45 children in each annual birth cohort would be expected to be in families with income below poverty, one benchmark that is used for targeting publicly subsidized ESAC programs.

For the 2011–2012 academic year, SMMUSD schools located in Santa Monica enrolled just over 9,400 students in all grades. Consistent with the makeup of the Santa Monica population as a whole, students in SMMUSD are more advantaged, on average, compared with their counterparts in the county or state. Nevertheless, there is a range of economic and social circumstances for students in the public schools. For instance, about 30 percent of SMMUSD students are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, meaning they are receiving free or reduced-price lunch or neither parent finished high school. Also at risk of poorer school performance are the 10 percent of students classified as English-language learners, with nearly 60 percent of this group being Spanish speakers. Recent data on school readiness based on the Early Development Instrument (EDI) further demonstrate that there are varying degrees of readiness for entering kindergartners across the seven neighborhoods examined, with a substantial minority of children who would be classified as not on track to succeed when they first enter school.

KEY ISSUES IN ESAC IN SANTA MONICA

The information and data-gathering activities confirmed that the ESAC system in Santa Monica has much to be commended. The city has a diverse mix of public and private ECE providers in home-based and center-based settings. There is a surplus of preschool spaces for city residents, which makes the city an attractive place to work for nonresidents with young children who wish to use care near their job. The city is one of the communities in Los Angeles County participating in Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) and the Los Angeles Steps to Excellence Program (LA STEP), two initiatives designed to improve the quality of ECE programs, although they affect a small num-

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ber of providers in Santa Monica to date (four for LAUP and 19 for LA STEP). The City of Santa Monica funds its child care subsidies using tiered reimbursement, which gives providers an incentive to be rated and to improve quality. It also funds other programs to support child development, with one example being a program to improve the capacity of child care providers to support social-emotional development through Family Services of Santa Monica and Connections for Children. Additionally, the city is participating in the EDI readiness assessment tool to better understand kindergarten readiness issues across the community. SMMUSD and the city work together to ensure that there are OST offerings on every elementary- and middle-school campus in Santa Monica; the city also invests in other off-campus OST offerings (including free options). Many parents provided positive feedback about their experiences in both ECE and OST programs; they value the ESAC services the city offers. These strengths mean the city has a solid foundation from which to further advance its ESAC system.

Despite these strengths, our qualitative and quantitative data revealed a number of important issues with ESAC in Santa Monica in each of the four areas of focus: access and participation, quality of care, service delivery, and financing. These issues, both those general to ESAC as well as those specific to ECE or OST services, are summarized in Table S.1.

Access and Participation

Parents are often unaware of the full range of ECE and OST options in Santa Monica and can find the system of care subsidies challenging to navigate. There is strong support for greater economic diversity of families in ECE and OST programs, particularly those that are funded by contracts and grants for a specific number of slots.

Santa Monica providers have more than enough ECE slots to serve the city's preschool-age children. However, there appears to be a shortage of infant/toddler spaces. Subsidy-eligible parents often experience delays in subsidy approval, which may result in missing the window of opportunity to register for programs with limited openings. Among parents who do not qualify for Head Start or the California State Preschool Program, many appear not to be aware that they may still enroll their child at their neighborhood school's preschool program on a fee-paying basis (space permitting).

Parents indicated that they did not have flexible OST payment options, especially for children in middle school and high school. Without the option to prorate fees for some full-time OST options, children with nonstandard schedules may not be able to participate. Moreover, parents often feel constrained in their OST choices by a lack of transportation for their children to the program option.

Quality of Care

While there was a perceived need on the part of many to improve the quality of ECE and OST program services, there is no objective quality information collected for all or most programs to validate that concern and identify specific areas to target for improvement. Moreover, research has shown that parents have difficulties identifying quality in care programs and typically rate quality higher than trained professionals. Greater transparency in program quality is critical for ensuring that parents are well informed when making care choices.

One indicator of ESAC quality for some stakeholders—economic diversity—is absent for some programs because of targeted funding streams and self-selection. Another quality concern specific to ECE was the need for greater alignment with the elementary grades for preschool programs located on school sites. A number of quality concerns were specifi-

Table S.1. Summary of Key Issues Identified for ESAC in Santa Monica

Care Type	Issue
a. Access and Participation	
Both	• Lack of parent awareness regarding available ECE and OST programs • Subsidized system is complex and challenging for parents to navigate • Need for more economic diversity of families in ECE and OST programs, especially those that are subsidized by contracts or grants that fund a specific number of slots
ECE	• Supply of slots available for infant and toddler care may be below demand • Delays in subsidy approval may close off program options, as some programs fill quickly • Parents may not know that public-school preschool programs are open to fee-paying parents
OST	• OST offerings do not meet the full range of family needs across the kindergarten through eighth-grade (K–8) age spectrum • Lack of prorating of fees for partial participation in OST programs limits options for families with nonstandard schedules and limits participation in additional part-time OST care • Lack of transportation between school and some off-campus OST programs constrains program options for families
b. Quality of Care	
Both	• Perceived need to improve quality of both ECE and OST • Limited objective data on quality shortfalls make improvement targeting difficult
ECE	• Parents need guidance concerning program quality, particularly for FCCH providers • Lack of coordination between schools and onsite ECE programs limits program alignment
OST	• Perception that staff in some programs are not well-qualified or are disengaged • Parents are concerned about safety issues with some programs (e.g., kids can leave when they want, safety of shared facilities, use of public buses) • Parents need homework to be done during OST program time, but this is not regularly provided • Limited options within some programs may not meet developmental needs of some older children
c. Service Delivery	
Both	• Mixed delivery system (public-private) is viewed as an advantage, but need to ensure programs are using public resources as efficiently as possible • Need to improve alignment (e.g., ECE with elementary grades; school day with after-school programs)
ECE	• Limited connection between school-based preschools and school principals and staff
OST	• Programs operated by public-sector agencies may have higher costs, but cost and quality tradeoffs with alternative delivery approaches are not fully known
d. Financing	
Both	• Most public funding sources for ECE and OST are targeted to a relatively small part of the city's population • Some public funding sources are not utilized (e.g., Title I for preschool services, CCLC, ASES) or are underutilized (e.g., tax subsidies) • Most public funding sources are constrained and likely to remain so

cally focused on OST programs. Staff qualifications were particularly noted; lack of homework help was another. Safety concerns were also raised, particularly in those programs that permit participants to leave without parent supervision.

Service Delivery

Like most communities, Santa Monica has a mixed public-private delivery system for both ECE and OST programming that offers a variety of care options. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing such a mixed delivery system, relevant for both ECE and OST programming, is ensuring that the different components in the system are aligned (e.g., a private OST provider is aware of the public schools' lesson plans). Many pointed to instances of programmatic nonalignment, both between ECE programs and elementary schools and between the school day and the OST services that precede or follow it. Alignment across preschool and the early elementary grades is hindered by having different agencies responsible for program oversight and delivery, as well as other institutional features that limit

communication and coordination. In the case of OST, where the City of Santa Monica directly operates several programs, a number of key informants we met with raised concerns about potentially higher costs when the city serves as the direct provider, although the cost to achieve the same quality of programming with alternative delivery options was not fully known.

Financing

There are potentially more than a dozen different public funding streams at the federal, state, and local level available to subsidize ECE and OST programs, as well as private funding streams from parents (e.g., fees), employers, and philanthropies. With some exceptions (e.g., LAUP), the public funding sources target lower-income families: either those below poverty or with income up to about twice the federal poverty line. Yet with a child poverty rate at about 6 percent and with a smaller share of low- or moderate-income families compared with Los Angeles County or the state, relatively few Santa Monica families qualify. At the same time, middle-income families may still find it challenging to pay the cost of full-time care in a licensed center or home with monthly fees of $1,000 or more for a preschool-age child and upward of $1,500 for an infant.

A comparison of the potential sources of public funds for ESAC and those used by programs in the city shows that some sources are currently untapped. Federal Title I funds could be used in full or in part for preschool services, whereas they are now allocated by SMMUSD to the elementary grades. The city could also qualify for two sources of OST funding that it has not yet pursued: federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) and the state After School Education and Safety (ASES) program. In addition, parent survey data indicate that families may not be taking advantage of features in the tax system that subsidize ESAC, either by claiming a child care tax credit on federal and state income tax returns or through an employer-established flexible spending account (FSA).

The future outlook for the public dollars that support ESAC adds to the funding challenges. While there is generally bipartisan support for programs investing in high-quality early learning programs and for providing a safe and stimulating environment for children beyond the school day, the fiscal prospects at the federal, state, and local level suggest that funding levels are not likely to expand any time soon and may actually contract further in some cases. Thus, assembling a viable portfolio of sustainable sources of ESAC funding is a major challenge for the city and SMMUSD.

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> Our review of model practices being implemented in other communities identified a number of strategies for ESAC in Santa Monica.

STRATEGIES DRAWN FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER COMMUNITIES

Our review of the research literature and model practices being implemented in other communities—many of a similar size and makeup as Santa Monica—identified a number of strategies for ESAC that address issues related to access and participation, program quality, service delivery, and financing. Table S.2 summarizes these strategies. For the most part, the literature and model initiatives listed focus on either ECE or OST, although many of the same strategies have relevance for

Table S.2. Strategies for ECE and OST Provision Based on Research and Existing Models

Domain	ECE	OST
Access and participation	• Expand access through new sources of funding (see financing section below) • Improve quality and expand offerings (e.g., dual-language programs) to attract more full-fee families and achieve greater economic diversity among enrolled children • Attract full-fee parents to cross-subsidize public or private programs • Close information gaps about available care options through multiple mechanisms (e.g., information campaigns, resource centers, event outreach, social media, the Internet) • Facilitate access to publicly funded programs through a common application	• Improve OST program uptake through outreach and recruitment, including: o Resource and referral systems o Market research to guide program offerings o Recruitment fairs and teacher outreach • Improve OST program engagement through attendance monitoring, high-quality programming, incentives, and employing young staff (e.g., college students or recent college graduates) • Facilitate participation through transportation services and coordinated program offerings
Quality of care	• Employ promising practices to improve quality of care, such as: o Quality rating and improvement systems o Raise standards and measure and monitor quality o Expand accreditation o Provide financial incentives to improve quality • Support the professional development of the ECE workforce through coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, and other mechanisms • Track children from preschool to elementary grades to measure impact of early learning programs	• Employ quality improvement strategies such as: o Technical support, training, professional development, and credentialing o Raise standards and measure and monitor quality and child outcomes
Service delivery	• Create a fully aligned P–3 system that improves school readiness and capitalizes on early investments • Invest in longitudinal data systems to measure ECE outcomes and link them to K–12 performance and other key indicators of child well-being	• Establish a nonprofit intermediary to provide technical assistance, establish data systems, coordinate across agencies, and engage in marketing and outreach • Configure a management structure consistent with a mix of school-based and off-site providers
Financing	• Create a dedicated funding stream for ECE programs (e.g., special tax levies) • Prioritize education funding (e.g., Title I funds, Proposition 30 funds) for ECE programs • Attract full-fee families to public ECE programs to stabilize funding • Engage employers as an added source of private support for ECE for their employees or the community more generally	• Create a dedicated funding stream for OST programs (e.g., general fund set-asides, special tax levies) • Use the nonprofit intermediary to raise private and public funds

the provision of early and school-age care—including creative strategies for outreach and recruitment, the focus on staff professional development as a way to raise program quality, and the creation of dedicated sources of funding. Many initiatives also make use of new technologies for information gathering, monitoring, and reporting.

Examples of strategies that may have relevance for Santa Monica include:

- attracting full-fee families to publicly provided preschools, often with innovative offerings such as dual-language immersion programs
- improving ECE program quality through mechanisms that measure and report quality, support and incentivize quality improvement, and monitor children's school readiness and educational outcomes
- aligning early learning programs with the early elementary grades (often referred to as preschool through third grade, or P–3, systems), with integration across the curriculum, teaching staff, professional development, data systems, and other aspects of the education environment
- using market research and other tools to guide OST program offerings and boost attendance and engagement

- providing transportation services to shuttle students from school to a diverse set of after-school programs designed to match their needs and interests
- using technology in after-school programs to track participant attendance and engagement, and link school-day learning progress with after-school activities
- employing a nonprofit intermediary to conduct OST marketing and outreach, coordinate across programs, establish data systems, and deliver technical assistance
- identifying new funding streams (e.g., a dedicated tax) or prioritizing existing funding streams (e.g., Title I funding) to support expanded access or improved quality of ECE or OST programs.

It is worth noting that a number of the strategies listed in Table S.2 are already employed in Santa Monica, such as the use of financial incentives for quality improvement (specifically through tiered reimbursement for ECE) and the engagement of employers to infuse private support for ECE in the community (namely, through development agreements).

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POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table S.3 provides a summary of our recommendations that respond to the issues that emerged in the course of the research. Some of the recommendations are relevant for the full range of ESAC services; others are specific to ECE or OST. Those recommendations that could be implemented in the short term are marked with a single asterisk; a double asterisk marks those recommendations that would require more time to develop and implement. A dagger denotes recommendations that would require significant new resources to implement. In many cases, we draw on the best practices and other innovative models we identified, although we typically recommend piloting major new approaches, even if they have been tried in other settings. A more complete discussion of the recommendations is contained in the body of the report; we also discuss the merits and drawbacks of alternative policy options when there is no clear policy course.

The recommendations are grouped in Table S.3 in relation to the four themes associated with the study questions: access and participation (recommendations A1 to A8), quality of care (recommendations Q1 to Q9), service delivery (recommendations S1 to S3), and financing (recommendations F1 to F7). From the perspective of the ESAC system as a whole, the specific recommendations support achievement of a set of interrelated objectives: obtaining data to support decisionmaking, improving information flows and addressing other barriers to care access, incentivizing and improving program quality, addressing alignment and other service delivery issues, and diversifying the funding base.

Obtain Data to Support Decisionmaking

Decisionmaking can almost always be improved by having more and better data. This project has contributed to that objective. Going forward, we recommend the following additional steps to support data-driven decisionmaking regarding ESAC:

- To better understand the care needs and experiences of families in Santa Monica, collect periodic data from a representative sample of parents (for example, annual or biennial data collection efforts that are representative of the population of Santa Monica and have sufficiently large samples to provide results for subgroups of interest) (A3).
- To support targeted quality improvement efforts and determine if those efforts are working, collect periodic independent assessments of ECE and OST program quality (Q1).
- To further monitor the developmental needs of children and the impact of QI efforts, collect kindergarten readiness data from individual children that can be linked with preschool developmental assessments and subsequent school performance (Q4).

Other recommendations, which we will discuss next, also contribute to this goal, such as the centralized waiting list, which will provide more accurate information on areas of unmet need (A2).

Table S.3. Summary of Recommendations for ESAC in Santa Monica

Care Type			Recommendations
a. Access and Participation (A)			
Both	*	A1.	Develop a web-based portal for one-stop information on ECE and OST care providers and sources of financial support, including options for subsidies
	*	A2.	Explore reestablishing a centralized waiting list specific to Santa Monica
	**†	A3.	Collect periodic data from a representative sample of parents on care use and need
ECE	**	A4.	Consider options for expanding infant/toddler slots in existing programs or new programs
	**	A5.	Develop a strategic plan for expanding public preschool slots for fee-paying families and increase awareness of this option
	*	A6.	Give priority enrollment for preschool slots in SMMUSD schools to neighborhood children who will continue on to kindergarten
OST	**	A7.	Coordinate OST offerings to meet programming and scheduling needs of children and families, and ensure that participants can access the offerings with appropriate prorated fees
	*†	A8.	Develop transportation options to shuttle students from site to site
b. Quality of Care (Q)			
Both	**†	Q1.	Collect periodic independent assessments of ECE and OST program quality to support quality improvement (QI) initiatives
	**†	Q2.	Create incentives and capacity for improving ECE and OST program quality
	*	Q3.	Align QI initiatives with developmental needs of children
ECE	**†	Q4.	Collect kindergarten readiness data that can be linked with preschool developmental assessments and subsequent student performance
	**	Q5.	Incorporate specific features in public preschool programs likely to attract full-fee families
	*	Q6.	Consider city subsidies for FCCHs in exchange for targeted QI
OST	**†	Q7.	Improve skills of OST program staff
	*	Q8.	Address safety concerns related to OST facilities open to the public
	**	Q9.	Improve quality of OST programming, with a focus on broadening the scope of available activities to appeal to middle- and higher-income families
c. Service Delivery (S)			
ECE	**	S1.	Develop a more closely integrated preschool–to–early public elementary system
OST	*	S2.	More closely connect OST staff and their activities with the K–8 staff and academic program
	**	S3.	Consider merits and drawbacks of contracting out OST programming to providers who operate on public-school campuses and/or other sites
d. Financing (F)			
Both	*	F1.	Encourage private- and public-sector employers to offer dependent care FSAs and to consider other ways of providing child care funding assistance to their employees
	*	F2.	Use web-based portal and other outreach methods (e.g., public awareness campaign) to increase parent knowledge and take-up of tax code subsidies for ESAC
	*	F3.	Encourage ESAC providers to routinely provide families with documentation needed to obtain reimbursement through tax subsidies or employer-based plans
	*	F4.	Encourage enrollments by fee-paying parents in public programs to provide more sustainable funding and increase economic diversity
	**	F5.	Explore the option of establishing a nonprofit intermediary to support ESAC services in the city
ECE	*	F6.	Examine options to (a) reallocate a portion of Title I funds or (b) use a portion of Proposition 30 funds to support preschool programming through expanded slots or improved quality of existing slots
OST	*	F7.	Review potential for relevant city agencies to qualify for state ASES and 21st CCLC funding and develop a strategic plan to secure funding if merited

NOTE: * denotes a recommendation that could be implemented in the near future. ** denotes a recommendation that may take more time to develop and implement. † denotes a recommendation that may require significant resources to enact.

> There are strategies the city can consider to improve information flows and to make the ESAC system work better for families in Santa Monica.

Improve Information Flows and Address Other Barriers to Care Access

Although a number of the issues related to access and participation arise because of the complex web of federal and state funding streams, eligibility requirements, and regulations over which the city has little control, there are strategies it can consider to improve information flows and to make the ESAC system work better for families in Santa Monica. The following recommendations are designed to support this goal:

- Establish a web-based portal for one-stop information on ECE and OST care providers and sources of financial support (both subsidies and tax-based options) to ensure that families have the information they need to support their care decisions. A web-based portal allows for more frequent updating, is more affordable to maintain, and was suggested by parents (A1).
- Explore reestablishing a centralized waiting list specific to Santa Monica to facilitate timelier and better matching of children to slots for which they qualify (A2).
- Consider options for expanding infant/toddler slots in existing programs or new programs if warranted by information on excess demand (e.g., from surveys (A3) or the waiting list (A2)) (A4).
- Develop a strategic plan for expanding public preschool slots for fee-paying families, following successful models in other communities, as a way to create more economically integrated programs and increase awareness of this option through the web portal (A1) and other mechanisms (A5).
- Give priority for preschool enrollments in SMMUSD schools to neighborhood children who will continue on to kindergarten as a way to support preschool–elementary school alignment, facilitate successful preschool to kindergarten transitions, and increase principal and elementary teaching staff buy-in (A6).
- Coordinate the content and schedule of OST offerings—following successful models in other communities that use social media and other outreach mechanisms to understand family needs (e.g., regarding offerings and schedules) and to engage students—and ensure that youth participants can access the activities offered at various sites with appropriate prorated fees (A7).
- Develop a transportation option (perhaps working with the transportation department) to shuttle students from school sites to OST sites (A8).

Incentivize and Improve Program Quality

An optimal strategy would be to make a clear public commitment to high-quality programs and QI. These efforts are likely to pay off in terms of creating better learning environments for children and improving their school performance; this reality can help to justify the costs associated with implementing some of these efforts. Moreover, improving ESAC program quality can further goals with respect to program access and participation (e.g., more diversity). The following recommendations are designed to support a commitment to quality:

- Create incentives (e.g., QI grants, expanded tiered reimbursement) for programs to improve quality and develop local QI capacity (e.g., expansion of tiered reimbursement, professional development supports, the planned training facility in the new civic center Early Childhood Education Center) (Q2).
- Align QI initiatives with the developmental needs of children, such as continuity of care in the early years and varied and developmentally appropriate OST offerings for school-age children (Q3).
- Incorporate specific features in public-school preschools such as dual-language immersion programs likely to attract full-fee families (Q5).
- As a motivator and support for improving quality, consider financial supports specifically for FCCH providers linked to QI goals targeting areas in need of improvement (Q6).
- Improve skills of OST program staff through standards for education and training and desired competencies, ongoing professional development, and on-site supervision (Q7).

- Address safety concerns related to public facilities through specific policies and increased staff-to-student ratios (Q8).
- Improve the quality of OST programming, with a focus on broadening the scope of available activities to appeal to middle- and higher-income families (Q9).

Align System Components and Address Other Service Delivery Issues

The two primary service delivery issues identified concern alignment and public provision of ESAC services versus private provision. Two recommendations pertain to alignment:

- Develop a more closely integrated preschool to early elementary system for both on- and off-campus programs, drawing where possible on successful systems (P–3 systems) in other communities (S1).
- More closely connect OST staff efforts with K–8 staff efforts by mechanisms such as an on-site OST coordinator for each school campus, integrated K–8 and OST in-service and other trainings, and other strategies used in successful OST systems in other cities (S2).

Alignment between preschools and elementary schools will also be facilitated by giving priority to neighborhood children in preschool enrollments, as already discussed (A6).

Regarding public versus private delivery of OST services, there may be a tradeoff between cost and quality: Services provided by a public-sector agency may be more costly, but quality may be higher as well. Even if a private provider can deliver the same program quality at lower cost, the government agency needs to consider the added administrative cost of contracting with outside CBOs and the costs of performance monitoring which may otherwise offset any cost savings. Direct provision offers greater control over the services provided and the potential for higher quality and greater public accountability. On the other hand, CBOs may be able to generate synergies with other services they provide and thereby provide more integrated and effective services at lower cost. With those tradeoffs in mind, we make the following recommendation with respect to OST:

- Consider the merits and drawbacks of contracting out OST programming on school campuses and/or at other sites to nonpublic providers, drawing on the knowledge base regarding performance-based accountability systems and their ability to incentivize organizations to provide high-quality services and to hold them accountable for meeting measureable objectives and piloting any new models for OST delivery (S3). If the city opts to pursue contracting out, a pilot outsourcing program at one or two school sites would provide information regarding costs and benefits to guide the possible expansion of this approach.

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Diversify the Funding Base

In considering policy options for sustainable ESAC funding, it is clear that there is no single untapped funding source that will provide stable long-term funding for ESAC in the city. Rather, the optimal strategy would appear to be to develop a diverse portfolio of public and private funding, where the public side would include as many of the federal, state, and local sources as possible and the private side would include fees paid by families and contributions from other private entities, such as employers and the philanthropic community. In many respects, Santa Monica already relies on a diverse mix of funding sources to pay for ESAC. But there is room to diversify even further, as indicated in the following recommendations:

- Encourage private- and public-sector employers, as part of more family-friendly workplace practices, to offer dependent care FSAs and to consider the value of providing child care funding assistance to their employees (F1).
- Use the web-based portal and other outreach strategies (e.g., social media) to increase the take-up of tax code subsidies for ECE and OST, which are especially beneficial for lower- to middle-income taxpayers (F2).

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- Encourage ECE and OST providers to routinely provide the required documentation (and instructions) needed for parents to obtain reimbursement through tax subsidies or FSAs (F3).
- Enhance the sustainability of public funding streams for ECE and OST by integrating fee-paying families and subsidized families into the same programs, a model already in place in Santa Monica and one that is being adopted more fully in other communities (F4).
- Explore the option of establishing or designating a nonprofit intermediary to channel public resources as well as private donations from foundations, businesses, and individuals into the provision of ESAC services in the city and to function as a central resource for innovation and technical assistance, for the creation and dissemination of data systems, for outreach to parents and the public, and for advocacy efforts (F5).
- Specifically for ECE, assess options for reallocating a portion of Title I funds or using a portion of Proposition 30 funds to create additional preschool slots or to improve the quality of existing slots, considering whether the return to using Title I funds to extend or improve ECE programming is higher than the return to allocating those funds to enhanced services during the elementary grades or whether the gains to investing Proposition 30 funds in ECE programming likewise exceeds the returns to restoring funding to other areas of education spending (F6).
- Specifically for OST, review the potential for city agencies to qualify for state ASES funding (more likely) or federal CCLC funding (less likely) and develop a strategic plan for winning such funding if warranted (F7).

A Stronger ESAC System Within the SMC2C Initiative

These recommendations are designed to promote an ESAC system that is an integral part of the SMC2C initiative. Adopting some or all of these recommendations would allow the city to move toward an ESAC system that is:

- **integrated**. The system would be better integrated across the age groups being served, from birth to kindergarten entry and from kindergarten entry through the school years. It would also be integrated across the public and private sectors.
- **inclusive**. The system would endeavor to serve children and families in the city in more economically diverse programs with the likely benefit, as well, of increased diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and language.
- **aligned**. The system would better align early education with the elementary grades and would more closely link the education that takes place during the school day with the care provided before and after school and during summer and school breaks.
- **high-quality**. The achievement of high quality in ECE and OST programs would be prioritized, supported, and recognized through incentives to achieve high quality and through objective measures that document when high quality is achieved.
- **innovative**. The system would seek to employ innovative and data-driven strategies that respond to the unique needs

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of the city's residents. Where possible, the city and its partners in the public and private sector would take advantage of new technologies (e.g., web-based tools) and communication tools (e.g., social media) to support information gathering, communication, and service delivery.

- **evidence-based**. The system would collect relevant data and information to determine the quality of the services being delivered and use that information to target quality improvement efforts. Data on school readiness and academic success outcomes also would be used to hold providers accountable and provide feedback that would guide further quality improvements.
- **diversified**. A diverse portfolio of public and private resources would support the system, taking full advantage of federal, state, and local funding streams and tax subsidies that provide financial supports to qualifying families and motivating the philanthropic and business communities to contribute as well.

Together, with these features, the City of Santa Monica, SMMUSD, and other stakeholders in the community have an opportunity to build a more seamless ESAC system that meets the needs of the city's children and families and that optimizes public investments in its future human capital.

About This Report

In July 2012, the City of Santa Monica Human Services Division and the Santa Monica–Malibu Unified School District contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct an assessment of child care programs in Santa Monica, California. The study was motivated in part by the perception of some stakeholders that the system of care in Santa Monica had become fragmented and complex. Additional motivations were the uncertainty of resource streams stemming from recent and anticipated state and federal budget cuts and a desire to ensure youth well-being in the community. The project sought to assess how well Santa Monica's child care programs meet the needs of families, including child care and early education programs serving children from birth to kindergarten entry, as well as care for school-aged children (focusing on kindergarten through eighth grade) in the hours before and after school and in the summer. This information would be used to make recommendations for ways to better meet family needs and sustain programs going forward.

The results of this study are fully documented in *Early and School-Age Care in Santa Monica: Current System, Policy Options, and Recommendations*, by Ashley Pierson, Lynn A. Karoly, Gail L. Zellman, and Megan K. Beckett, RR-289-CSM (available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR289.html), 2014. This report was funded by the City of Santa Monica and the RAND Corporation. This research was conducted jointly in RAND's Education and Labor and Population units. Additional information about RAND is available at www.rand.org.

The full report summarizes findings from a variety of data collection methods, all of which would not have been possible without assistance from the City of Santa Monica; SMMUSD; Connections for Children; and many community members, including parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, and child care providers. We are grateful for their time and willingness to share their thoughts with us and to provide us with important data. From the City of Santa Monica, we would especially like to thank Robin Davidson, Patty Loggins-Tazi, Julie Rusk, Julie Taren, and Setareh Yavari. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of Judy Abdo, Sally Chou, Terry Deloria, Sandy Lyon, and Jan Maez from SMMUSD. Patti Oblath at Connections for Children provided invaluable information and assistance to the project. For his contributions, we would also like to thank Jonathan Mooney, who serves as consultant to the City of Santa Monica for the C2C initiative.

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