Study Summary and Next Steps: "Early and School-Age Care in Santa Monica: Current System, Policy Options, and Recommendations" (RAND Corporation, 2014)

Study Purpose: In 2012, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District ("SMMUSD") and the Community & Cultural Services Department of the City of Santa Monica ("City") contracted with the RAND Corporation to better understand early and school-age care in Santa Monica, including strengths and opportunities for improvement. The purpose of the study 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."

Demographic Overview: According to the study, as of 2011, children under age 18 comprised approximately 13% of the population. The overall poverty rate was approximately 12%. Based on data from the 2011-2012 school year, approximately 30% of SMMUSD students were classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, meaning they were receiving free or reduced-price lunch or neither parent finished high school.

Study Methodology: As part of the study, RAND assembled publicly-available demographic information, analyzed parent survey data collected by SMMUSD and the City, conducted five focus groups with parents, constructed an inventory of local early and school-age care programs, collected cost data from a small number of early and school-age care providers, conducted interviews with parents and other stakeholders such as PTA and community college representatives, and conducted a review of model practices being implemented in other communities. Findings should be considered within the context of study limitations, including small sample sizes.

Early Care Strengths in Santa Monica: Infants, Toddlers, and Preschool-Age Children
- Preschool is widely available across the community
- The community has a diverse mix of public and private early care providers in home and center-based settings
- The community is participating in the Los Angeles Universal Preschool and Los Angeles Steps to Excellence Program, two initiatives designed to improve the quality of early childhood education programs
- The tiered reimbursement funding system for early care subsidies gives providers an incentive to be rated on program quality and make improvements
- The community is participating in the Early Development Instrument readiness assessment tool to better understand kindergarten readiness issues across the community
- Many parents provide positive feedback about their experiences in early care programs

School-Age Care Strengths in Santa Monica: Kindergarten through 8th Grade Students
- SMMUSD and the City of Santa Monica together ensure that there are out-of-school time offerings on every elementary and middle school campus in Santa Monica
- The City of Santa Monica also invests in off-campus out-of-school time offerings, including free options
- As with early care programs, many parents provide positive feedback about their experiences

Opportunities: Birth through 8th Grade
The study discusses several opportunities for improving early and school-age care. Some are specific such as potentially expanding infant and toddler care spaces and considering the transportation services currently available to out-of-school time programs. Others, including conducting independent program evaluations and cost-benefit analyses across program providers, require systems-level reform.

Santa Monica Cradle to Career Initiative: Findings from the RAND study will be considered within the context of the Santa Monica Cradle to Career ([SMC2C](#)) initiative. Formed in 2011, the SMC2C initiative leverages public and private resources to maximize youth outcomes from birth through age 24. Using a ["collective impact"](#) framework, SMC2C partners establish common goals, prioritize indicators for evaluating progress, share and analyze data (e.g., the RAND study), and commit to applying data and evidence in decision-making. SMC2C partners coordinate services across the full spectrum of factors that influence youth wellbeing, including learning, school achievement, physical health, social skills, confidence, emotional maturity, and mental health. In 2013, the SMC2C initiative prioritized four goals: (1) Increasing Kindergarten Readiness, (2) Improving Youth Connectedness and Emotional Health, (3) Engaging Vulnerable Youth Ages 16 to 24 and their Families, and (4) Improving College and Career Readiness. To establish baselines and measure progress on youth outcomes, SMC2C partners created the 2012/2013 Youth Wellbeing Report Card and published an update in 2014.

Next Steps Based on Study Findings: SMC2C partners will be considering detailed findings and recommendations from the RAND study during upcoming working group sessions in 2014. Examples of action steps based on study findings already underway in the community include:

- Improving Alignment: The study recommends developing a more closely integrated preschool to early elementary system, as well as more closely connecting out-of-school time staff efforts with K-8 staff efforts (i.e., through integrated in-service and other trainings). Follow-up steps to help improve alignment include:

  o Completing a study on the feasibility of **Neighborhood Preschool for All** as one potential strategy for improving alignment between preschool and kindergarten (SMMUSD is the lead entity)

  o Advancing a **Kindergarten Readiness Campaign*** to support parents and early care providers in preparing children to succeed in school (Connections for Children is the lead entity, in partnership with SMC2C), as well as developing a new Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) with a teaching laboratory (Santa Monica College is the lead entity, in partnership with the City)

  o Continuing the "**whatever it takes" approach*** to support vulnerable youth ages 16 to 24 in achieving positive outcomes (e.g., high school graduation, employment, resiliency) and expanding the strategy to children under age 16 (the City and SMMUSD are co-leaders, in partnership with SMC2C)

- Prioritizing Data and Evidence in Decision-Making: The study also recommends obtaining objective and independent data on the effectiveness and efficiency of early and school-age care programs. Follow-up steps to help gather and prioritize data in decision-making include:

  o Continuing to collect, analyze, and apply data from the **Early Development Instrument** to improve kindergarten readiness, as well as continuing to report on kindergarten readiness outcomes in the Youth Wellbeing Report Card (the City, SMMUSD, and Connections for Children are the lead entities)

  o Piloting the use of a **common data collection system** across public and private providers participating in the "whatever it takes" approach (the City is the lead entity, in partnership with SMC2C)

  o Connecting information about program costs from public and private out-of-school time providers with evaluations of program quality and impact, with the goal of conducting **cost-benefit analyses** that will support decision-makers in maximizing returns on investments (the City is the lead entity)

*Aligns with findings and recommended action steps discussed in the Youth Wellbeing Report Card.