



San Francisco
Department of Early Childhood

Parent Engagement Findings Report

APRIL 2024

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Introduction and Overview

The Department of Early Childhood (DEC) is a City and County of San Francisco Department dedicated to our young children's safe and healthy development. As the City's largest funder of early childhood, DEC is committed to creating a system that ensures every child can thrive and learn. DEC provides public investment, expertise, and leadership to put resources into the hands of those who care for our City's youngest children.

DEC was established as a City department in 2022. DEC's first strategic plan has established the department's goals and core strategies, defined its imperative to advance racial equity, and created a shared foundation for action to achieve its vision that "Every child in San Francisco has the best start in life and our City is a great place to raise a family."

Included in the **strategic plan** are three strategic priorities, which help guide how DEC will advance racial equity in policy, planning, and service delivery across the early childhood network of care. These department-wide strategic priorities are:

Strategic Priority 1:

Amplify parent voice and influence in shaping policy and programs.

Strategic Priority 2:

Increase cultural responsiveness of all early childhood development services.

Strategic Priority 3:

Increase transparency in communications and open access to information and services.

In 2023, DEC embarked on a communications and community engagement planning process to inform how it should advance these strategic priorities. The planning process was itself guided by the strategic priorities. Parents were involved as partners throughout the process, and had multiple opportunities and different modalities for participating and sharing their perspectives. The planning process was developed and led by VIVA Social Impact Partners, in partnership with Parent Voices SF and representatives from DEC.



Landscape Analysis

The City of San Francisco has made significant investments in early childhood. In 2018, San Francisco voters passed Proposition C, a commercial rent tax that generates the most significant city fund in the nation exclusively dedicated to expanding high-quality early childhood experiences. DEC leverages dollars from Proposition C, as well as additional city, state and federal funding, for new and expanded investments in high-quality early childhood experiences that can lead to a brighter future for our City's children and families.

For example, families in San Francisco earning up to 110% of the area median income—which is the majority of San Francisco families—are eligible for free childcare and preschool through DEC's Early Learning San Francisco initiative. Families can access free parenting classes, playgroups, and other services through DEC's network of Family Resource Centers. DEC also invests in various children's health and mental health initiatives, including free developmental screenings for families. In addition, DEC supplements early educators' salaries through its Workforce Compensation Initiative, bringing early educator pay in line with that of K-12 educators.

These are historic investments that represent a holistic system of financial and other support for families with young children. It is imperative the DEC is able to effectively reach all early childhood stakeholders with the information they need to effectively participate in this system.

Furthermore, by doing this in alignment with its strategic priorities noted above, DEC has the opportunity to transform the early childhood communications experience for its stakeholders. DEC can ensure that critical information is available at the right time, in the languages and mediums that families need. DEC can create alignment across the many different people, organizations, and systems that families interact with to minimize confusion and maximize access to information. DEC can also foster authentic and lasting relationships and partnerships with families.



Overview of Community Engagement Process

DEC began the planning process by identifying their desired outcomes. This resulted in **key learning questions** (see Appendix 2) that would guide DEC's engagement with parents and stakeholders operating within the early childhood system in San Francisco. The learning questions were designed to align with DEC's aim to meaningfully engage and co-create with parents of young children residing in San Francisco as outlined in their 2023-2027 strategic plan.

DEC's learning questions were addressed through seven different parent and stakeholder engagement opportunities:

1. A **parent communications workgroup** was involved throughout the process. Thirteen participants met five times over 6 months and provided feedback on key planning activities, focus group and survey questions, and the draft communications and community engagement plan.
2. Six **parent focus groups** were convened to gather perspectives from 59 San Francisco families on communications needs and preferences. Focus groups included: African American/Black families (10 participants), Spanish-speaking families (session held in language with 10 participants), Cantonese-speaking families (session held in language with 11 participants), Tagalog-speaking families (session held in language with 10 participants), parents of children with special needs (7 participants), and multi-ethnic English-speaking families (11 participants).
3. A **parent survey** was distributed online and reached 1676 parents across the County.
4. Three **in-person community events** were held reaching approximately 120 parents; a modified parent survey was distributed at these events (61 survey responses).
5. Four **stakeholder listening sessions** were held to understand the perspectives and communications needs of the professionals who work with children and families. The listening sessions were held with: early childhood education professionals (9 participants), family resource center staff (9 participants), mental/behavioral health providers (9 participants), and healthcare providers (2 participants).
6. Three **key informant interviews** were held with four people who have experience leading communications and/or community engagement efforts for organizations in San Francisco.
7. One **DEC staff retreat** was held with members of the communications, policy, and data and evaluation teams.

In addition, DEC's communications and community engagement team, along with VIVA, have been implementing DEC's existing communications efforts throughout the process, providing real-time feedback on the current messages and strategies.

Summary of Community Engagement Findings

Summary of Parent Communications Insights and Preferences

MEDIUMS AND APPROACHES

1. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the delivery of information. Communications should be offered in a variety of formats and parents should be able to opt-in to the information delivery channels that work best for them.
2. Early childhood focused communications should be concise, using large font and include weblinks to foundational information.
3. Communications that include photos and visuals that support the viewer's understanding and online mediums such as program websites, social media, and interactive information such as videos and podcasts are helpful.
4. Cantonese, Spanish, and Tagalog speaking parents emphasized that communications should be available in their home language.
5. Parents expressed that word of mouth from other trusted parents and caregivers, as well as from trusted organizations, is an effective way to learn about available programs and resources. This can include tapping into existing networks and sharing information on platforms used by different parent communities.

CONTENT AND PRIORITIES

6. Parents reported a preference for seeking and/or receiving information related to parenting, such as tips, opportunities for socialization with other parents, and training related to building capacity in their parenting skills. The majority of parents and caregivers surveyed would elect to receive information from DEC.
7. Due to the abundance of family and parent information across different channels and organizations, parents across groups noted that they often misplace information, or review it too late which results in missing an event or a deadline to sign up for support.
8. Parents care about funding and accountability mechanisms used by County and City departments.
9. Parents report raising their children in San Francisco for a variety of reasons, which include the availability of resources and social supports, access to reliable familial support, and the diversity of cultures and residents
10. Challenges to raising children in the city included the process of attaining child care, the cost of living, and safety concerns, while celebrated aspects of raising children in the city included the diversity of the people and the tendency to face less discrimination, availability of resources and social supports, public transportation and outdoor parks, playgrounds and free events.

Summary of Parent Engagement and Relationship-Building Insights and Preferences

11. Trust is built through a number of factors including the act of providing ongoing support, demonstrated understanding of the needs, and professionalism exhibited by support staff.
12. DEC can build trust with San Francisco-based parents and caregivers by (1) demonstrating attentiveness to the needs of each target demographic group/ community; (2) developing and maintaining an active presence in communities across San Francisco; (3) centralizing materials and information about resources so they are accessible to all families; (4) embedding antiracist approaches to the organization's communications efforts.
13. Language is a key part of building trust for many cultures. Many communities are also anchored by non-language based aspects of their communities' culture (for example, food served, ethnicities of staff at events).
14. Surveys and focus groups are the most popular way for parents to provide input and share their experiences. The length of a touch point is a potential factor for the types of engagement opportunities that are most popular. Parents shared that quick and easy engagement opportunities are preferred.
15. Parents approve of and are intrigued by the concept of a parent ambassador program to help parents navigate services.
16. Parents and primary caregivers would like support forming connections with other families. The majority of parents surveyed reported little to no connection to other families with young children in San Francisco.
17. DEC should share back tangible results from feedback provided by families and do so relatively quickly.

Summary of Partner Insights and Communications Needs

18. Streamlining co-branding policies and approaches would ease pain points and facilitate unified communications among early childhood system stakeholders and DEC.
19. Formal quarterly communication and marketing check-in meetings with collaborating organizations and agencies would support joint and unified communications among system stakeholders.
20. System stakeholders would like access to an intranet or central repository where they can access DEC approved messaging, visuals, videos, and other communications materials.
21. DEC should ensure other San Francisco-based agencies have clear information about DEC, how it fits into the network of city services, and how to help families access early childhood supports.



Community Engagement Findings

Parent Communications Workgroup

Background & Recruitment

The Parent Communications Workgroup was an essential central body that guided the communications and community engagement planning process. The group convened 5 times over the course of 6 months to support and inform the creation of the communications and community engagement plan.

In order to populate a parent workgroup to guide the communications and community engagement planning process, as well as parent focus groups to share communications-related insights, DEC, VIVA, and Parent Voices SF worked together to determine and implement a thoughtful recruitment process that would yield diverse representation and new perspectives. Towards this goal, DEC established required and optional criteria to guide recruitment and selection of workgroup members (see [Appendix 3](#)).

Recruitment outreach included emails sent to contacts on the Children’s Council mailing list and DEC’s strategic planning mailing list and in-person outreach conducted at family resource center events. It resulted in a list of 310 parents. From there, parents were filtered based on participation interest and demographics to establish pools for the workgroup and for population-based focus groups. Following the creation of a random sample of interested participants, DEC selected final workgroup participants based on the pre-established required and optional member criteria and group representation priorities (see [Appendix 3](#)).

The recruitment processes resulted in a workgroup consisting of 13 San Francisco-based parents each with at least one child 7 years and under. Workgroup members represented a range of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds. The workgroup itself was facilitated in English thus all participants were English speaking; however, several participants were bilingual and brought a multilingual perspective throughout the planning process.



Once formed, the Parent Communications Workgroup focused on:

- Identifying guiding questions for the communications planning process, appropriate parent and other stakeholder groups to share insights, and methods for reaching and gathering input from these populations.
- Assessing the DEC brand key messages to ensure a consistent approach to speaking about DEC during planning touchpoints.
- Conducting a comprehensive audit of any parent-facing information on early childhood development, parenting, programs, and services in San Francisco, reviewing for messages, gaps, and opportunities and recommending solutions (focus on information and outreach to harder-to-reach populations and reviewing for racial equity and inclusion.)
- Sensemaking qualitative and quantitative results from parent focus groups and digital parent surveys.
- Reviewing and prioritizing draft communications and community engagement strategies

Key Takeaways

In addition to co-designing and informing the above pieces of the overall planning process, the discussions and contributions of the parent workgroup resulted in the following key learnings:

- 1. Parents care about funding and accountability mechanisms used by County and City departments.** During the second workgroup meeting the DEC representatives described the role DEC holds within the early childhood system in San Francisco. As a government funded department, DEC actualizes its mission and core strategies by providing contracts and grants to community organizations. Community organizations then provide direct services to the community. Once it was clear that tax dollars are used to fund the services parents access from community organizations for their families, parents became interested in DEC's oversight procedures and accountability procedures for all contracts with community organizations. The discussion indicated a need for DEC to develop communications around their role as a steward of public funds that will be easily understood by a broad audience.
- 2. Communications should be clear, concise, and resonate with its target audience, and DEC should leverage trusted community voices.** In preparation for 6 parent focus groups facilitated by VIVA and Parent Voices SF, the workgroup piloted a set of focus group questions. The following insights were shared:
 - a.** Early childhood-focused communications should be concise, using large font and include weblinks to foundational information.
 - b.** The most preferred way to receive early childhood focused communications is through emails from trusted community organizations.
 - c.** Communications that include photos and visuals that support the viewer's understanding and online mediums such as program websites, social media,

and interactive information such as videos and podcasts are helpful.

- d. Parents expressed that word of mouth from other trusted parents and caregivers is also an effective way to learn about available programs and resources. These findings also coincided with what was heard during the focus groups.
3. **Parents approve of and are intrigued by the implementation of a parent ambassador program.** Parent ambassadors—also called parent navigators or promotoras—can bridge the gap between early childhood supports and services and parents to ensure families obtain access to resources and navigate systems effectively. During a review of the draft strategies for the communications plan, the parent workgroup participants noted that the Ambassador program should be paid, and should be reflective of the City’s diversity, representing different cultures, languages, and demographics.
4. **Parents appreciate the opportunity to have deeper involvement in DEC’s work.** Workgroup participants were actively engaged throughout the process and shared that they enjoyed contributing to the planning process and sharing their insights.

Workgroup discussions also confirmed many of the findings gathered through the focus groups and survey, described below.

Parent Focus Groups

Background & Recruitment

Over the course of two months, July - August 2023, VIVA, and Parent Voices SF facilitated six focus groups which included San Francisco-based parents with at least one child under the age of seven.

The recruitment process mirrored the approach used to recruit the parent communications workgroup members. Since recruitment for the focus groups and the parent communications workgroup was initially conducted concurrently, to obtain a pool of interested parents, the focus group recruitment strategies mirrored efforts taken to form the workgroup. Parents who indicated that they were interested in participating in a focus group via survey—where they shared demographic information such as preferred language and race/ethnicity—were later contacted and given additional meeting details to assess availability. From those that indicated their availability to participate, participants were



randomly selected and formally invited to attend focus groups specific to each of DEC's target demographic groups:

1. African-American/Black Families
2. Spanish-Speaking Families
3. Cantonese-Speaking Families
4. Tagalog-Speaking Families
5. Parents of Children with Special Needs
6. Multi-ethnic English-Speaking Families

Each focus group included up to 12 participants for a total 59 participating parents. Each focus group was facilitated in the primary language of the participants. To honor learnings from DEC's previous strategic planning process where they engaged county residents, all focus group facilitators mirrored the race, ethnicity, and background of the groups they facilitated. At the end of each session all attendees received a \$100 electronic gift card for sharing their expertise and experiences.

Each focus group was guided by a standardized set of discussion questions which were designed to align with DEC's learning question grid and further refined by the parent workgroup. Discussion questions outlined in the focus group protocol focused on three key areas:

1. Information delivery preferences: Attendees discussed the types of early childhood information and messages they receive, what types of information resonate with them as well as how they prefer to receive information about early childhood services, programs, and local events to meet their needs.
2. Experience accessing early childhood services: Attendees discussed how communications have helped them access early childhood services and their trusted sources of information and offered ideas for how DEC can build trust with parents.
3. Experience raising children in San Francisco: Attendees discussed successful and challenging aspects of raising children in San Francisco and reflected on why they were raising their children in the region.

Key Takeaways

The following cross-cutting themes were derived from the three topic areas, of information delivery, assessing early childhood services, and experiences raising children in San Francisco. The detailed report is in the appendix (see [Appendix 4](#)).

Key Findings Related to Receiving Information

1. There is a no one-size-fits-all approach to the delivery of information: Parents in all groups reported receiving information, messages and updates related to families and young children in a variety of channels. Although the preferred vehicles of information differed by individual within each parent group, the following channels for receiving information were shared across groups.

- a. Emails, text, social media, online searches and websites
 - b. Word of mouth (ie., parent-to-parent sharing) either in person or through mobile chat groups.
 - c. Viewing or receiving physical flyers in frequently visited areas within their neighborhood. Parents in the African American group noted that communication mechanisms should be varied and include non-digital options, in part due to older populations' lack of access to technology.
2. Parents want to receive information about parenting their children: Across all groups, parents reported a preference for seeking and/or receiving information related to parenting, such as tips, opportunities for socialization with other parents, and training related to building capacity in their parenting skills.
 3. Key details help communications resonate with parents: Across groups, parents spoke to the importance of including key pieces of information in communications about programs, activities, or services in the city. Parents expressed wanting to be able to assess quickly if an opportunity is right for their family.
 - a. Due to the abundance of family and parent information across different channels and organizations, parents across groups noted that they often misplace information, or review it too late which results in missing an event or a deadline to sign up for support.
 4. Communication materials, opportunities advertised, and staff providing support should do so in the language of the individual: Across groups with parents that were either multilingual or monolingual in Cantonese, Spanish, and Tagalog, parents emphasized that communications should be available in their home language. If communications are advertising an opportunity or event, employing staff that speak the family's language is desired, especially when calling the organization or service to gather additional information.
 5. Responsiveness to culture goes beyond language: Parents within the multi-ethnic English speaking, African American and Parents of children with special needs groups explained that although language is a key part of many cultures, some communities are anchored by non-language based aspects of their communities' culture. For example, in the multi-ethnic English speaking and African American parent groups, participants raised that cultural responsiveness can present itself in the types of food that are offered at the opportunity, service or event. Participants spoke to the organization having staff or representatives that reflect the ethnicities they serve.

"When [the communication] relates specifically to Black families. I know it's geared towards my family and makes me want to read those emails."

—Parent Focus Group Participant

6. Utilize community voices and champions: Parents in the multi-ethnic English-speaking and Cantonese-speaking parent groups explained that members from their community can be leveraged to share information with their community; “more voices are needed from the community and to the community.”

“More voices are needed from the community and to the community.”

—Parent Focus Group Participant

Key Findings Related to Engagement with DEC

1. Parents with young children rely on trusted community-based organizations for social support: Various organizations were named as trusted sources of information and support including: pediatricians, child care programs, SF public library, Safe & Sound, Families Rising, B Magic, Mo Magic, Good Samaritan, GLIDE, SOMA Resource Center, Mercy Housing, Children’s Council, and SOMCAN.
2. Trust is built through a number of factors including the act of providing ongoing support, demonstrated understanding of the needs, and professionalism exhibited by support staff: Among several groups, parents reported trusting organizations because of the types of content and resources they shared with families.
 - a. Often the resources shared directly met an interest or vital need for the parents.
 - b. Consistent presence and communication throughout their young child’s development builds trust.
 - c. Parents reported developing strong relationships with organizations that personalize their outreach to families.
 - d. Parents within the African American and Cantonese speaking parent groups emphasized the importance of learning about an organization from someone in their network.
3. Parents across groups noted four ways DEC can build trust with San Francisco-based parents and caregivers:
 - a. Demonstrate attentiveness to the needs of each target demographic group/community.
 - b. Develop and maintain active presence in communities across San Francisco.
 - c. Centralize materials and information about resources so they are accessible to all families.
 - d. Continue to engage parents as partners, through approaches such as workgroups, focus groups, and events. In other words, parents often shared that they liked the approaches used during this planning process and would like to see them continue. Embed antiracist approaches to the organization’s communications efforts.

4. A mix of approaches works best for giving parents a range of participation options to suit their needs and interests: Surveys and focus groups were the most popular engagement options identified by parents; the majority shared that quick and easy engagement opportunities were preferred. However, there was also interest in more time-intensive engagement opportunities such as task forces, parent advisory boards, and parent ambassador/navigators. In each focus group, these were selected as preferred approaches by at least a couple of parents.

Key Findings Related to Raising a Child in San Francisco

1. Parents report raising their children in San Francisco for a variety of reasons, which include the availability of resources and social supports, access to reliable familial support, and the diversity of cultures and residents
2. Challenges to raising children in the region were attributed to the process of attaining child care, the cost of living, and safety concerns.
3. Celebrated aspects of raising children in the region were attributed to the diversity of the people and the tendency to face less discrimination, availability of resources and social supports, public transportation and outdoor parks, playgrounds and free events.

Unique Findings by Demographic Group

Broad Multi-Ethnic English-speaking Focus Group

- Parents shared that accountability, transparency, consistency, and community engagement are vital for building trust. Parents would like to see organizations take accountability and implement change. An open forum and community outreach and engagement are important to parents.
- Parents in this group shared that cultural responsiveness meant having staff and representatives reflect the diverse populations served, as well as having diverse representation on a leadership board and having a parent board.
- Anti-racist practices and utilizing grounded language and a kind, inviting tone were noted as important aspects of communication.



Spanish-speaking Focus Group

- Parents expressed a strong desire for organizations that provide parenting and educational workgroups, training, and support services. They also sought out organizations that provided resources such as diaper distributions, food, educational information, and social services.
- Parents shared that communications should be written in Spanish to be responsive to their culture and language.

Cantonese-speaking Focus Group

- Parents expressed trusting early childhood information received through word of mouth communications and through mobile chat groups on platforms such as WeChat.
- The types of information and services they seek are art classes, training, handcraft classes, storytime, parent organizations and groups. Parents shared they would like information on parenting classes via zoom or emails.
- Parents expressed feeling excluded by some communications and information about opportunities because they see a lot of information is primarily translated in Spanish and English.
- Parents also expressed that organizations should prioritize increasing the income threshold at daycare centers and the number of children they can accept.

Tagalog-speaking Focus Group

- The Tagalog focus group findings suggest that parents would like to receive educational information on various topics such as parenting skills, nutrition, development, CPR information, and reproductive health.
- Parents suggested including telephone numbers on event flyers and ensuring personnel who answer calls speak the caller's primary language.
- Accessibility of materials is a concern for parents, as they requested materials that are in a central area so they are easy to access and find. Parents also highlighted that they often find difficulty filling out applications for childcare. They stated it would be helpful if DEC developed and shared information on how to fill out paperwork. They also requested assistance in dispelling misinformation or myths related to eligibility.
- Parents highlighted that system navigation support can aid those that have recently immigrated to the region and want to access support for their children.

Black/African-American Focus Group

- Parents within the African-American parent group noted the importance of imagery used in communications. Imagery that depicts or relates to the African American community indicates that the event is accepting and may be attended by members of their community.

- Parents expressed that organizations often focus significantly on language, and for them, communications materials targeting specific neighborhoods and places close to their home are culturally significant. Parents stated that physical flyers in their neighborhood regarding culturally relevant events and information allow organizations to be present in their communities.
- Trusted community-based organizations include: Families Rising, First 5 of California, SFUSD AAPAC, B Magic, Mo Magic and Roots Community Organization (East Bay Area)

Parents of Children with Special Needs Focus Group

- Accessibility and convenience were noted as significant factors, with parents highlighting the importance of events and programs being close in proximity and having accessible parking.
- Parents emphasized the need for accessibility in language and high-quality translations.
- Flyers with QR codes, maps, and visuals were also seen as helpful.

Digital Parent Survey

Background & Engagement Metrics

From August to September 2023, 1,676 parents completed a 20-item digital survey. The survey was distributed to capture information about parent and primary caregiver’s desired engagement opportunities, communication preferences, and to understand the needs of families in San Francisco.

The survey was advertised on social media through paid advertisements, email, and local community partners. The survey was available in six languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Arabic, and Chinese. To compensate families for sharing their experiences, the first 300 parents received electronic gift cards.



Survey Engagement Metrics:

- 1,676 parents and primary caregivers engaged who reported living in a San Francisco zip code with at least one child 7 years or younger.
- Gender Identity: 88% Cisgender Women, 9.2% Cisgender Men, 0.4% Transgender Women

- Income: 38% Less than \$34.9k; 23% between \$35-\$60.9K; 8% between \$61-\$84.9k
- Age of the Respondents Children: 56% preschool age (3-5 years); 35% toddler age (12-35 Months); 29% elementary school age (6-7 years)
- Zip Codes Representing Majority of the Respondents (945 respondents or 56%): 94112, 94124, 94134, 94110, 94103
- Race/Ethnicity of the Respondents: 43% Asian (not Filipino or Pacific Islander); 35% Hispanic, Latino, Latinx; 8% Black or African American; 8% White, 3% Filipino; 1% Pacific Islander, 1% Middle Eastern, and 1% American Indian
- Responses by Survey Language, 747 English surveys; 508 Chinese surveys; 417 Spanish Surveys. 2 Vietnamese surveys; 1 Arabic survey; and 1 Tagalog survey

Key Takeaways

1. When asked to prioritize the type of information they could receive but currently do not have access to, parents reported that they would like to receive information on city-funded programs, local family activities, information on supporting their child’s learning and health, as well as parenting tips.
2. Respondents shared that the best ways for DEC to share information with them was through emails and text messages. It is noted that this finding coincides with what was heard during the majority of the focus group sessions.
3. Respondents reported a desire for information about parenting/caregiving, such as tips and tricks, opportunities for socialization with other parents and caregivers.
4. When asked if they would sign up to receive information from DEC, 68% (N=1,676) of all respondents noted that they would elect to receive information from DEC.
 - a. A cross-tab analysis was conducted, and there were no significant differences based on the respondent’s income or the age of their child.
5. When asked if they felt connected to other families with young children in San Francisco, the majority of parents surveyed (52%, N=1459) reported little to no connection to other families with young children in San Francisco.
6. Participants were also asked if they would like help forming connections with other families.
 - a. 40% (N= 1,459) of all respondents stated they would like support forming connections with other families.

52% of parents reported little to no connection to other families with young children in San Francisco.

1459 parents responded

were invited to complete a brief three-question survey (available in digital and paper formats) which included an opportunity to share their contact information with DEC. Parents shared information related to the types of information they would like to receive from DEC, the frequency at which they receive information from DEC and top of mind information DEC should know about raising young children in San Francisco including the needs of their family and/or community.

In-Person Survey Findings

Out of the plethora of parents engaged through the events, 66 parents and caregivers submitted survey responses. The in-person survey was offered and completed in English, Spanish, Chinese and Filipino.

Survey responses mirrored the results from the parent digital survey.

1. When asked to identify the types of information they would like to receive from DEC, majority of respondents indicated that they would prefer information about local family friendly activities, city-funded programs and services such as parenting classes preschool enrollment and childcare, information that support their child's learning and development by age, and parenting best practices and ideas for activities to complete with their child by age. The least preferred options included information about supporting their child's health by age, information about input and feedback opportunities, mental health focus groups, and information about ways to improve access to high quality child care for low income families.
2. Of the 66 respondents, 50% prefer to receive information on a monthly basis and 32% prefer to receive information on a weekly basis.
3. When asked to share what they would like DEC to know about raising young children in San Francisco, the respondents highlighted: resource navigation support, free family events, psycho-educational information, and the need for increased safety around child play areas.

Stakeholder Listening Sessions

Background

Four 1-hour listening sessions were conducted in an effort to obtain insights from the following key early childhood system stakeholders: early childhood mental health providers, family resource center staff, early care and education communications and/or family engagement and enrollment staff, and health care providers.

The objectives of each session included the following:

1. Understand early childhood system partners' interest in engaging with the Department of Early Childhood, including tools and processes needed to develop unified early childhood-related communications.

2. Learn key messages early childhood system stakeholders believe all parents should know.
3. Discuss lessons learned about outreach and communication efforts that best resonate with families.
4. Learn about early childhood system stakeholders' perceptions of DEC's current and future role in the early childhood system.

Key Takeaways

Approaches that Resonate

- Treat parents as partners and experts in the child's experience.
- Utilize visual arts and local artists that are a part of the communities DEC wants to reach.
- Partner with community-based organizations, and Parks & Recreation community centers to communicate early childhood information to families.
- Attend neighborhood and cultural events to build awareness and distribute information.
- Identify parent leaders or liaisons to communicate and distribute information.
- Diversify mediums and channels used to communicate. Consider radio, videos, social media, town halls, and television program appearances.
 - An attendee spoke to the implementation of a website feature that allowed families to type questions and receive information. The tool utilizes Google translate to allow for multilingual interactions.
 - Print materials were found to be unsuccessful methods of communication according to health care providers. Text messages with links to websites providing additional information were found to be better received.
- Consider shifting language used to communicate information about mental health.
- Using "communal healing" or "spiritual healing" instead of "Mental Health"
- Isolating mental health from other types of health may be foreign, and they tie it to everything else (especially with younger kids). They emphasize social and emotional development instead of mental health.

Key Messages All Families Should Receive

- Health and wellness key messages shared by stakeholders including the following:
 - Reduce screen and phone use among infants.
 - Parenting is hard, and parents should feel encouraged to seek help (ie., social and emotional wellness).
 - Give young children a strong start by eliminating sugary beverages from their diet.

- Develop and maintain healthy routines.
- Early childhood development key messages emphasized by the stakeholders include:
 - A child’s brain develops rapidly during the first 5 years of their life. If a child needs developmental support, early intervention is needed for better outcomes later in that child’s life.
 - Parents have a role to play in supporting their child’s development.
 - If your child is not meeting developmental milestones, seek support from caring and knowledgeable professionals.
 - Stakeholders noted that it is important to calm parent anxieties around developmental milestones and encourage them to seek early intervention support.
 - Parents and primary caregivers are their child’s first and most important teachers.
- Early care and education key messages emphasized by the stakeholders include:
 - Young children should begin attending an educational project or day care by age three.
 - These environments allow for critical social interaction and engagement. There are identifiable differences among children who did not attend preschool during the pandemic.
 - Sign up for school one year prior.
 - Early childhood education matters! It’s crucial for parents to understand that the early years of a child’s life are critical for their cognitive, emotional, and social development. Providing a nurturing and stimulating environment can significantly impact a child’s future.
 - Benefits of early literacy
- System navigation key messaging shared by the stakeholders include:
 - There is no wrong door of entry to receive support and care for your child. For example, a family can seek support from Children’s Council and can find resources for their concerns even if their concern is not related to ECE or health care.

Approaches for Communicating in Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Ways

1. Across groups, participants emphasized the importance of developing and sharing information in a variety of languages. Parents should be able to access information in their primary language.
2. Share information in a concise manner that is written at a level accessible for all.

Preferred Approaches & Process to Support Unified Communications

- Stakeholders requested that DEC clarify and streamline co-branding policies and approaches as this would help facilitate the collaboration process. For example, approved templates with co-branding already implemented may reduce the rounds of review needed before content can be released to the community.
- Facilitate formal quarterly communication and marketing check-in meetings with collaborating organizations and agencies to brainstorm approaches, uplift ongoing efforts, remedy challenges and prepare for future communication efforts.
- Develop a shared visual or logo that all collaborating organizations can use in their communications to indicate that they are a part of a larger early childhood system of support in San Francisco. This can help stakeholders within the system build trust with families and caregivers.
- Develop an intranet or central repository where stakeholders and collaborators can find DEC approved messaging, visuals, videos, and other communications materials that can be distributed to the families. Collaborators could access up-to-date information as needed.
 - The intranet could include a folder for grantees to share photos and other updates from their community events. DEC could then share the impact of their grantees' events via social media and other communication channels as desired.

Stakeholder Views of DEC's Current & Future System Role

1. Stakeholders noted that DEC has the potential to become the 'one stop shop' entity for early childhood information. DEC has the ability to be innovative and use creativity to improve access to services that families need.
 - a. DEC can build rapport with families and stakeholders by communicating their intended purpose, structure, the programs and services they fund, and direct services they offer (if any).
 - b. It was emphasized that a communication hierarchy would benefit DEC and their grantees. Consider working with grantees to ensure communications from community members about the successes of a program and the frustrations that have been faced are first shared with the community organization who has a long standing relationship with the community member.
2. Health care as well as early care and education administrators noted that DEC can coordinate the distribution of information related to nutrition, health and wellness. They can specifically work to improve access to mental health care for young children and communicate offerings to families.
 - a. Consider engaging and collaborating with the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center to achieve communication goals related to health, wellness and child care resources.

Key Informant Interviews

Background

VIVA and DEC conducted three interviews with four people with communications and/or community engagement experience in San Francisco. These key informants shared their expertise, experiences, and recommendations for DEC as it embarks on its own communications and community engagement efforts. While specific details of the conversations varied, the following themes and recommendations were voiced across the interviews.

Key Takeaways

Building Trust

- Be visible and create opportunities to interact directly with families
- Focus on relationships—be welcoming, supportive, and non-judgmental
- Share back tangible results from feedback provided by families; do so relatively quickly
- Create a two-way street for sharing information with and gathering feedback from staff and partners

Outreach

- Direct outreach, such as email, is important. Don't rely solely on intermediaries (eg., those providing direct services) to communicate with families
- At the same time, equip partners and those representing DEC to communicate effectively on its behalf
- There is a need for tools, people, and information to help with learning about and navigating early childhood services



Partnership

- Start by finding small, targeted opportunities to partner with other agencies for tangible results that can tell a powerful story
- Ensure other agencies have clear information about DEC, how it fits into the network of city services, and how to help families access early childhood supports
- Explore partnering with city departments to offer more early childhood programming
- Share information with city departments on what's available through family resource centers and DEC's other funded early childhood supports, so that they can effectively pass that information on to families

Audit Findings

Race Equity Audit

In December 2023, in preparation for the development of a comprehensive communications and engagement plan for the San Francisco Department of Early Childhood, VIVA Social Impact Partners conducted a racial equity and inclusion audit of DEC's content and infrastructure. DEC's website and social media channels were reviewed during the audit process. The auditors focused their review on all written content, accompanying visuals and accessibility options. The following recommendations were identified:

DEC Website Recommendations

1. Include visuals that show fathers, uncles, aunties, grandparents, same sex couples etc.
2. Update font choice to improve readability.
3. Clarify the purpose of the website on the home page.
4. Test the Family Resource page on mobile and review how the map shows up. How would it work on a mobile device to be able to hover on a red marker and get an address more quickly.



5. Accompany acronyms with full names when possible.
6. Add a page that defines key early childhood and education terms/ phrases. I.E., define developmental delays, developmental screening,
7. It is unclear which childcare providers offer services in languages other than English. It would be helpful to list out what languages the two agencies (Wu Yee and Children's Council) offer services in so if someone is looking for help but doesn't want to experience not being able to communicate with someone, they know what languages are offered before contacting them.

DEC Social Media Channel Recommendations

1. Include visuals that show male teachers, fathers, uncles, aunties, grandparents, same sex couples, etc.
2. Consider including posts with various languages. For example, one post can allow several "pages" that users can swipe through

Parent Communications Audit

During one of the parent workgroup meetings, participants conducted an audit of a selection of DEC's communications platforms. The audit consisted of:

1. Navigating the DEC website on either desktop or phone, www.sfdec.org, to assess if they could find desired information
2. A review of one place-based advertisement to determine if it captured attention and shared helpful information
3. A scan of DEC's Facebook page, along with two peer Facebook pages, San Francisco Recreation and Parks and the San Francisco Public Library, to assess tone and types of content



Website Audit Recommendations

- Parents expressed the need for a central hub for resources that was searchable and included all relevant information (for example, languages spoken at childcare programs). It should be comprehensive of resources parents might need for their children (for example, specific types of therapy).
- It was noted that the site worked well on mobile and participants were able to find the information they were looking for.

- It was noted that the website had a lot of text, which could be shortened for better readability and less scrolling.

Advertisement Audit Recommendations

- Parents appreciated that the advertisement used bold and bright, family friendly colors. Photos were recommended as an additional family friendly element.
- Using a QR code to help people access additional information was noted as useful, but it should be as big as possible for visibility and ease of use.
- Critical information, such as who an event is for, dates, or locations, should be as large/visible as possible. It was noted that a viewer should be able to quickly see all of the information they'd need to make a decision, without needing to use a QR code or visit a link.
- Parents also noted that ads should be multilingual if possible, to emphasize that the information was for everyone, and to ensure that most people who saw them could understand them.

Social Media Audit Recommendations

- Parents appreciated that content was available in multiple languages, it was age-appropriate, and there were good visuals.
- Some found the tone of DEC's posts engaging; others thought they could be more engaging.
- Parents shared that they would be interested in information related to DEC's mission, spotlights of family-friendly organizations around the City, events for families (including before and after events), and child development information and resources.
- Parents also noted that events could be shared on Eventbrite—not just social media.

1. Community Engagement Participants

PARENT COMMUNICATIONS WORKGROUP

- Janie Alcindor
- Tina Morales
- Ane Louise Gaudert
- Rodney Newman
- April Fong-Ortega
- Michelle Gyorke-Takatri
- Kathleen Sheung
- Elicia Dangerfield
- Erika Galavis
- Annie Chung
- Rachel Gunabe
- Jessica Hobbs
- Rosa Baltonado

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

- Abigail Stewart-Kahn (She/Her), MSW, LCSW, Stanford Graduate School of Education and Managing Director, Stanford Center on Early Childhood
- Sarah Madland, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, San Francisco Department of Recreation and Parks
- Rita Davila Ferrer, Supervisor, and Raeshawn Banks at Family Risings, San Francisco Human Services Agency

FACILITATORS

- Laura Bowen, VIVA Social Impact Partners
- Jaelyn Edwards, VIVA Social Impact Partners
- Joseline Delgadillo, VIVA Social Impact Partners

SUPPORTING FACILITATORS

- Jenny Lam, San Francisco Department of Early Childhood
- Maya Castleman, San Francisco Department of Early Childhood
- Maria Luz Torre, Parent Voices
- Lily Marquez, Parent Voices

2. Learning Questions Grid



**Department of Early Childhood
Parent Communications Planning
Learning Question Grid
Updated June 12th, 2023**

Overview: This learning question grid is a map designed to guide parent and stakeholder engagement efforts throughout DEC's communications planning process, which is taking place from February 2023 - September 2023. The components of the plan below aim to answer DEC's questions related to what the department is hoping to learn from families and stakeholders within the early childhood system in San Francisco. The components are designed to be in alignment with the department's aim to meaningfully engage and co-create with parents of young children residing in SF as outlined in the [2023-2027 Strategic Plan](#). This grid includes key learning questions alongside indicators and potential engagement input sources. The learning questions were drafted based on the DEC Core Team and the DEC Policy and Communications Team brainstorming in March 2023. Domains 1 - 4 are associated with parent-focused learning questions, and domains 5 - 7 are stakeholder learning questions.

DEC's Parent Engagement Input Sources:

1. Parent Communications Workgroup: Recurring touchpoints over five months. The group will provide input, share suggestions, and sensemake findings from other parent input sources.
2. Parent Focus Groups: Single touchpoints with DEC's target demographics to discuss complex, nuanced questions that require context from the session facilitators. Sessions will discuss up to four topics. Meetings are likely 1 to 2 hours each.
3. Digital Parent Survey: Single 15-question survey meant to gather information on needs and preferences from a broad population of families. Should take at most 10 minutes to complete and will cover 3 to 4 topics. Utilizes survey logic to ask appropriate follow-up questions.
4. In-person Parent Engagement Events: Quick & short touchpoints (approx 5 minutes or less). Parents review and react to visual items and questions. Events are to be planned to reach specific demographics that are underrepresented in the survey to foster community engagement in a priority neighborhood.

DEC's Stakeholder Engagement Input Sources:

1. Stakeholder Interviews: Single touchpoint interviews with community engagement staff or similar relevant staff at other city departments that serve children and families.
2. Stakeholder Listening Sessions: Single touchpoint listening sessions with funded and non-funded partners.
3. Digital Engagement Platform for Early Childhood Service Providers: document and share listening session insights with additional stakeholders who didn't participate in the listening sessions. Users would review and react to ideas and insights, share new thoughts, and help with prioritization of what has been shared.

PARENT AUDIENCES		
DOMAIN 1: Communication Methods		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
1a. What technology or infrastructure processes are needed to reach and engage parents where they are at? What do parents prefer?	1. Parent preferences for receiving information. by target demographic	Focus groups
1b. What information/communication have you received that resonates?	1. Aspects of past communication efforts that resonate with parents	Focus groups
1c. What can we do through our communications and engagement strategy to be more linguistically and culturally responsive? How can we lessen/remove barriers and create more equity?	1. Strategies to increase linguistic and cultural responsiveness 2. Strategies to increase equity within DEC's communications	Focus groups
1d. What types of information do families want to receive from DEC? (eg., softer information on best practices or only program-specific information) Where is there a gap in trusted sources of information that DEC should fill?	1. Type of information requested by parents 2. Information gaps reported by parents	Focus groups Digital survey
1e. How much information do parents want from DEC, and how frequently? What kind of information and what kind of relationship do parents want with DEC (do they want us to be reaching out to them proactively or do they just want us to be here and available when they need us? Do they want only info about programs and services or about fun games, activities, best practices?)	1. Preferred frequency of information received 2. Preferred volume of information received 3. Type of information parents want from DEC	Digital Survey
1f. What terms/words do parents use to talk about DEC's focus areas and programs? How do they differ by language?	1. Understanding of early childhood-related terms	Parent Communication Workgroup
1g. Where are families getting trusted information about early childhood?	1. Sources of trusted early childhood information	In-person parent engagement event
1h. What reach and recognition have current campaigns had?	1. Brand recognition	In-person parent engagement event Focus groups
1i. What approaches to storytelling resonate? Are parents open to sharing their stories? If so, how?	1. Approaches to storytelling that resonate with families 2. Methods for collecting parent stories.	Focus groups

DOMAIN 2: Early Childhood System		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
2a. What early childhood system pain points exist for parents and how can DEC's communications reduce barriers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties experienced by parents in the early childhood system Roadblocks in early childhood system Types of communications parents needed to reduce barriers. 	Focus group Digital survey
2b. How do families think the city's early childhood services should be communicated and accessed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Perspectives on how early childhood services and programs in San Francisco should be communicated to parents Perspectives on accessing early childhood services and programs in San Francisco 	Focus group Digital survey
DOMAIN 3: Interacting with the Department of Early Childhood		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
3a. What are the top three things parents think DEC should know?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities identified by parents 	Digital survey In-person parent engagement events
3b. How can DEC build trust with parents?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Methods to increase parents' trust in DEC 	Focus group
3c. How do parents want to be involved in DEC processes and decision-making? What types of formats can you/do you want to participate in? (Short term and especially long-term)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Preferred parent engagement types Preferred short-term engagement roles Preferred long-term engagement roles 	Focus group Digital survey
DOMAIN 4: Raising Children in San Francisco		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
4a. What do parents need from the city to feel that this is where they want to raise their children?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support needed from DEC to support parents raising children in SF 	Focus Group In-person parent engagement event

4b.	What do they already know/think that the city offers to families?	1. Understanding of services and programs offered in San Francisco	Focus group
4c.	What makes raising a child in San Francisco great? (Despite all the challenges, why do you choose to stay in SF and raise your child here?)	1. Factors that influence parents' ability to raise children in San Francisco	Focus group
4d.	Do you feel connected to other families; what makes you feel connected to other families in the City? How can DEC help to build/strengthen these connections through our communications and family engagement?	1. Number of families that feel connected to other families 2. Factors that help parents feel connected to other families	Digital survey
Stakeholder Audiences			
DOMAIN 5: Joint Communication Efforts			
Learning Question		Indicator	Potential Input Source
5a.	What is needed from DEC to help us communicate together in a unified way? To reach and engage parents, to communicate in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive, to communicate transparently. What are some things such as messaging, tools can DEC develop to support your engagement with families, and unified messaging across all early childhood contact points?	1. Process, tools, and collateral needed to support unified early childhood-related communication from DEC and stakeholder	Interview Listening session Engagement platform
5b.	How do stakeholders want to be engaged with DEC, at what frequency, and method of communication?	1. Preferred frequency of engagement from DEC 2. Preferred method of engagement from DEC	Interview Listening session Engagement platform
5c.	What messages do stakeholders feel are important? If there was one piece of information every parent you work with should know, what is it?	1. Types of communications and messages stakeholders believe parents should know	Interview Listening session Engagement platform

DOMAIN 6: System Partner Lessons Learned		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
6a. Lessons learned of what is resonating with parents regarding outreach and communication with parents? What have they learned works or doesn't work? In general, what are they already doing? Especially from health/mental health providers	1. Lessons learned	Interview Listening session
6b. Are there things DEC/OECE/F5 has done in the past that's been helpful with communications?	1. Lessons learned	Interview Listening session
DOMAIN 7: Stakeholder Perspectives of the Early Childhood System		
Learning Question	Indicator	Potential Input Source
7a. What do they know about what the city/ DEC is doing in early childhood?	1. Understanding of DEC's role in the early childhood system	Interview Listening session
7b. Do stakeholders think DEC is encroaching on the Early childhood system? Do stakeholders see DEC as a threat? How can we avoid competing against one another?	1. Perceptions of DEC's current and future role in the early childhood system. 2. Methods to ensure cooperation and collaboration among system leaders/participants	Interview

3. Parent Communications Workgroup Recruitment, Prioritization and Selection Process



San Francisco Department of Early Childhood

San Francisco Department of Early Childhood Parent Communications Workgroup

Recruitment, Prioritization, & Selection Process

Communications Planning Project Background

San Francisco Department of Early Childhood (DEC) built a comprehensive communication strategy and infrastructure with the goal of:

- 1) Enhancing public engagement and public interest in their work
- 2) Creating brand awareness and recognition
- 3) Bolstering direct parent engagement on a regular and consistent basis

In order to help SF DEC accomplish these goals, VIVA and Parent Voices collaborated with DEC staff to develop the following deliverables:

- A communications plan to guide DEC
- A community engagement strategy and infrastructure to maintain parent engagement in ongoing communications efforts

The work was largely done through a Parent Communications Workgroup, as well as parent focus groups (6), stakeholder listening sessions, and interviews with early childhood service providers and other city agencies.

The target outcomes of the project included:

1. Enhanced and active interest in DEC, including amongst target populations.
2. Increased DEC brand awareness across target populations in San Francisco County.
3. Robust infrastructure in place for direct family engagement with families of color and those with limited English proficiency.
4. Increased and sustained internal capacity to advance the communications and family engagement work.

Overview of Parent Communications Workgroup

In alignment with the [DEC Strategic Plan](#), the Parent Communications Workgroup involved parents from the target communities that DEC hopes to reach. The workgroup was facilitated by Laura and Jaelyn (of VIVA) and Lily and Maria (of Parent Voices). This group met six times over the course of 6-7 months to create the plan. The Parent Communications Workgroup was facilitated in English and included bilingual parents so they could bring a multilingual perspective to the audit of parent-facing information.

The Parent Communications Workgroup specifically focused on:

- Identifying guiding questions for the communications planning process, appropriate parent and other stakeholder groups to share insights, and methods for reaching and gathering input from these populations.
- Assessing the DEC brand key messages to ensure a consistent approach to speaking about DEC during planning touchpoints.
- Conducting a comprehensive audit of any parent-facing information on early childhood development, parenting, programs, and services in San Francisco, reviewing for messages, gaps, and opportunities, and recommending solutions (focus on information and outreach to harder-to-reach populations and reviewing for racial equity and inclusion.)

Recruitment Goals for Both the Parent Communications Workgroup & Parent Focus Groups

To ensure that the Communications Plan considers and includes the perspectives of a wide range of parents and caregivers from across San Francisco who may not be familiar with DEC, the recruitment for both the Parent Communications Workgroup and the Parent Focus Groups aimed to reach a new and diverse set of voices. The goal of recruitment for both the Parent Communications Workgroup and the Parent Focus Groups was to have parents and caregivers that meet the following criteria:

Required Criteria

1. Parents/caregivers of children ages 0-7, with a diverse representation of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary schoolers **with the majority being 0-5.**
2. Parents/caregivers who have not been involved in DEC/F5SF/OECE's policy discussion and decision-making tables.
3. Parents/caregivers with diverse socioeconomic statuses (max threshold is 200% of the State Median Income).
4. Must live in San Francisco and represent a variety of zip codes within the city.
5. Must be able to attend at least five out of six monthly meetings.
6. Parents/caregivers from target communities as named in the SF DEC Strategic Plan, which include (all groups must be represented):
 - Multilingual families
 - Black families
 - Indigenous families
 - Latino families
 - Pacific Islander families
 - Families with children who have special needs

Optional Criteria

7. A mix of parents/caregivers who have previous experience in some type of leadership and systems change work (e.g., FRC parent action committees or Head Start parent leaders) and parents and caregivers with no experience in these types of work.
8. Include male-identifying parents/caregivers, e.g., fathers.

Parent Communications Workgroup Prioritization & Selection Process

Developing Pool Of Participants

In order to populate a parent workgroup to guide the communications and community engagement planning process, as well as parent focus groups to share communications-related insights, DEC, VIVA, and Parent Voices SF worked together to determine and implement the recruitment process.

Recruitment for the workgroup and focus groups was initially conducted concurrently to obtain a pool of interested parents. Parents were reached through in-person and digital efforts over the course of 2 months. Interested parents completed a survey asking for demographic information and which input opportunity they preferred (workgroup and/or focus groups).

The outreach resulted in a list of over 300 interested parents. From there, parents were filtered based on their participation interests and demographics to establish pools for the communications workgroup and for population-based focus groups.

Prioritization & Selection

The list of potential workgroup participants was cleaned and filtered for the required and optional priority criteria. Then VIVA used a randomization process to identify 20 participants for DEC to review and prioritize for an invitation to the workgroup. DEC used the following selection process when reviewing a de-identified list of parents in their selection tool:

1. DEC reviewed participants' prior involvements with DEC, OECE, First 5, and Parent Voices and removed those who had already participated in previous policy, planning, and advocacy conversations.
2. DEC reviewed participants' zip codes and prioritized those with zip codes that only appeared once in the sample.
3. DEC reviewed participants' language capacity and prioritized those who are bilingual/multilingual.
4. DEC reviewed race and income distribution to ensure diverse representation. In scenarios where there were multiple participants from the same zip code with the same race and/or income, DEC reviewed child age and prioritized participants with children 0-5 years old or those who had multiple young children.
5. DEC reviewed the final prioritized group to ensure there was representation of parents of children with special needs.
6. DEC asked VIVA to identify an additional Latino/a parent, preferably someone bilingual, as this group was underrepresented in the original random sample.

Using DEC's selections, Parent Voices and VIVA extended invites to the prioritized parents. A group of 13 parents began participating in the Parent Communications Workgroup sessions, which commenced in May 2023.

4. Parent Focus Group Summary Report



San Francisco Department of
Early Childhood

Parent Focus Group Findings

December 2023

Between July 17th - August 23rd, VIVA, and Parent Voices facilitated six focus groups with parents of young children in San Francisco. The focus groups were held to gather parent insight on preferred methods of communication about early childhood information and understand parents' perspectives about how barriers to early childhood services can be reduced through DEC's communications efforts. The meetings also served as an opportunity to learn what it is like to be a parent in San Francisco, including what parents need to successfully support their families.

Focus group participants were required to be a parent of at least one child between the ages of 0-7 years and be residents of the City and County of San Francisco. Participants were compensated with \$100 electronic gift cards for participating in the DEC parent communications planning process.

The following focus groups, delineated by target demographic, were convened and are reflected in the focus group findings below:

1. African American/Black Families
2. Spanish Speaking Families (session held in language)
3. Cantonese Speaking Families (session held in language)
4. Tagalog Speaking Families (session held in language)
5. Parents of Children with Special Needs
6. Multi-ethnic English Speaking Families

Each focus group was asked the same set of nine discussion questions. The discussion questions were designed to align with [DEC's Learning Questions Grid](#), which is a map designed to guide parent and stakeholder engagement efforts throughout DEC's communications planning process. Discussion questions outlined in the focus group protocol focused on three key areas:

1. **Information delivery preferences:** Attendees discussed the types of early childhood information and messages they receive, the types of information that resonate with them as well as how they prefer to receive information and early childhood services, programs, and events to parents in San Francisco to meet their needs.

2. **Experience accessing early childhood services:** Attendees discussed how communications have helped them access early childhood services, shared their trusted sources of information, and offered ideas for how DEC can build trust with parents.
3. **Experience raising children in San Francisco:** Attendees discussed successful and challenging aspects of raising children in San Francisco and reflected on why they were raising their children in the region.

Information Delivery

Learning Questions Addressed:

- **(1a)** What technology or infrastructure processes are needed to reach and engage parents where they are at? What do parents prefer?
 - **Indicator:** Parent preferences for receiving information, by target demographic
- **(1b)** What information/communication have you received that resonates?
 - **Indicator:** Aspects of past communication efforts that resonate with parents

1. **Discussion Question:** *What kinds of information, messages and/or updates about what is happening in and around the city related to families and parenting children do you receive?*

Summary of Findings

- **No one-size-fits-all approach to the delivery of information:** Parents in all groups reported receiving information, messages, and updates related to families and young children in a variety of channels. Although the preferred vehicles of information differed by individual within each parent group, the following channels for receiving information were shared across groups.
 - Online websites like FunCheapSF and ActivityHero
 - Email from entities such as their child's daycare or school, Natural Resources, Childhood Matters, Recess Collective, Children's Council, SF Parks & Recreation, and the SF Public Library
 - Text messages from local community-based organizations and government agencies
 - Social media pages, especially Facebook
 - Word of mouth (ie., parent-to-parent sharing) either in person or through mobile chat groups. This is the primary method of receiving information for those participating in the Cantonese-speaking parent group.
 - Viewing or receiving physical flyers in frequently visited areas within their neighborhood. Parents within the Spanish-speaking, Tagalog-speaking,

Cantonese-speaking and African-American parent groups indicated the importance of physical materials that can be viewed, picked up and shared with other families in their communities. Parents in the African American group noted that communication mechanisms should be varied and include non-digital options due to older populations' lack of access to technology.

- Due to the abundance of family and parent information across different channels and organizations, parents across groups noted that they often misplace information, or review it too late which results in missing an event or a deadline to sign up for support.
- **Desire for information about parenting:** Across all groups, parents reported a preference for seeking and/or receiving information related to parenting, such as tips, opportunities for socialization with other parents, and training related to building capacity in their parenting skills.
- **Other** interests shared within the parent groups include,
 - Information about local early childhood activities such as art classes, story times, and family events that can be attended by all ages (significant for families with several children with differing ages)
 - Child development information, including nutrition information
 - Desire for resources to grow English language capacity (Tagalog-speaking parent group)

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Preferred communications channels include online websites like Funcheap SF, social media, word of mouth, text messages, and email listservs for organizations such as Natural Resources, Childhood Matters, Recess Collective, Children's Council, SF Parks & Rec, and the public library.
 - Prefer content with information about parenting (e.g., parent tips).
 - Due to an abundance of information, parents indicated that information received via various communication channels can get lost and misplaced.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Explained that they prefer to receive information via WhatsApp, text messages, emails, and through word of mouth.
 - Often receive information about their child's school or through email listservs like ActivityHero.
 - Noted that in-person engagement is often a better method of outreach. Parents noted that they feel seen during in-person outreach opportunities. Also noted is a preference for seeing communication materials at parks, community centers, and libraries.
 - Would appreciate it if information was centralized in an email.

- African American Parents:
 - Prefer to find physical flyers in their neighborhood. This will increase awareness and recognition of organizations and their resources.
 - Not all communications should be delivered via email due to older populations' lack of access to technology. Senior populations are involved in early child care and education.
 - Parents report receiving emails regarding school events, kids' events, and family and language support.
 - Parents report seeking out information from organizations that provide culturally relevant information and from organizations that reflect their ethnicity and community.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Preferred communication methods include emails, physical pamphlets, text messages, and social media sites like Facebook.
 - Desire information about parenting via educational workshops. Parents have enjoyed attending workshops on Zoom as of late.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Informational flyers and flashy posters grab attention.
 - Parents report seeking information about daycare.
 - When seeking information about early childhood activities, parents review information from the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department.
 - Would like to receive information about art classes, storytime, parent groups, and parenting workshops. Would attend parent classes via Zoom or review information via email.
 - Participants noted that they appreciate it when organizations host events and allow other organizations to table. This allows parents to learn about new organizations in a trusted environment. For example, it would be helpful for representatives from the police department and fire department to table at events.
 - Expressed difficulty assessing information unless it is through word of mouth or a personal network of other parents via mobile phone group chats. Often, they seek and share information through WeChat parent groups and social media sites like Facebook.
 - Note that they often receive and/or review information about resources, activities, and events too late, and as a result, they can not pursue them.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Prefer flyers, texts, and emails. Would like physical communications to be posted near schools, childcare centers/sites, and community-based organizations that parents often frequent with their children. Would like to

be able to take and share physical communication materials, such as flyers, with members of their own community.

- Some parents reported that they do not utilize social media for information about early childhood because they do not know how to use it.
- Would like to receive information about nutrition, parenting skills and tips, child development, CPR information and certification, and reproductive health, including breastfeeding.
- It was also noted that parents would like information and support to increase their English language capacity.

2. Discussion Question: *Let's think about the last few times you received or came across information about a program, activity, or service that is available in the city. What about it was interesting? What about it caught your attention? What aspects resonated with you?*

Summary of Findings

- **Key details help communications resonate with parents:** Across groups, parents spoke to the importance of including key pieces of information in communications about programs, activities or services in the city. Parents expressed wanting to be able to assess quickly if an opportunity is right for their family. Parent emphasized the following
 - If the opportunity is free, state so in large font as this is eye-catching.
 - Information should be easy to read.
 - State the location and time of the opportunity as this indicates to parents if it is accessible to them. Parents indicated two types of preferences; the majority preferred attending events held in their communities while some preferred to learn about opportunities in other neighborhoods.
 - Share details about the opportunity so parents can determine if it is good fit for their child and/or family (i.e, state ages ranges that are appropriate and if whole family can attend ensure that is clear)
 - Fun colorful designs grab attention
 - Parents within the African American parent group noted the importance of imagery used in communications. Imagery that depicts or relates to the African American community indicates that the event is accepted and may be attended by members of their community.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Communication materials should include the following
 - If the event or opportunity advertised is free of cost, state so in large font to catch attention.
 - State age ranges for which the event is appropriate. This would help families with children of various ages understand who can attend.
 - Include location, time, and background information about the opportunity.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Information should be easy to read
 - A resource or event should be in close proximity to their community and have accessible parking.
 - Utilize QR codes along with visual cues to aid the reader.
- African American Parents:
 - Culturally specific events and free events resonate well with parents and families.
 - Communication materials such as colorful flyers that represent their community catch their attention.
 - Communications should include imagery of their community. This would indicate to many that the event is welcoming to their community and that other members of their community will likely be there. Lack of imagery will result in some parents dismissing the event and opting out of attending.
 - Zoom meetings are also helpful in relaying information.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Often seek and receive information and resources about diaper distributions, food, educational information, and social services.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Informational and flashy posters or flyers with event information resonate well.
 - Parents shared they often find information at local CBO's when they are obtaining services or resources. These are ideal places to place physical communications materials.
 - The location of the resource or opportunity should be easily accessible via their transportation method of choice.
 - Some parents prefer to receive information weekly.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Include telephone numbers on flyers, and it would be best if there is a staff member who speaks Tagalog at the organization that is designated to provide language support and can talk with the parent on the phone.

Learning Question:

- **(1c)** What can we do through our communications and engagement strategy to be more linguistically and culturally responsive? How can we lessen/remove barriers and create more equity?
 - **Indicators:** Strategies to increase linguistic and cultural responsiveness; Strategies to increase equity within DEC's communications

3. Discussion Question: *What does it look like for communications to be responsive to your culture, language, and community-specific experiences?*

Summary of Findings

- **Communication materials, opportunities advertised, and staff providing support should do so in the language of the individual:** Across groups with parents that were either multilingual or monolingual in Cantonese, Spanish, and Tagalog, parents emphasized that communications should be available in their home language. If communications are advertising an opportunity or event, employing staff that speak the family's language is desired, especially when calling the organization or service to gather additional information.
 - Across non-English speaking participants language accessibility and support was emphasized as the primary factor for considering whether communications and opportunities are culturally and linguistically responsive. For example, parents in the Spanish speaking group shared that they were motivated to attend the focus group because it was clear that the opportunity would be held in their primary language.
- **Responsiveness to culture goes beyond language:** Parents within the multi-ethnic English speaking, African American and Parents of children with special needs groups explained that although language is a key part of many cultures, some communities are anchored by non-language based aspects of their communities' culture.
 - For example, in the multi-ethnic English speaking, African American parent groups, participants raised that cultural responsiveness can present itself in the types of food that are offered at the opportunity, service or event.
 - Participants spoke to the organization having staff or representatives that reflect the ethnicities they serve.
 - Culturally specific events and the presence of culturally specific festivals
 - Communications materials that explicitly include imagery of their community and its members.

- Visual aids to promote accessibility for all abilities types (i.e. QR codes)
- **Utilizing community voices and champions:** Parents in multi-ethnic English speaking and Cantonese speaking parent groups explained that members from their community can be leveraged to share information with their community; “more voices are needed from the community and to the community.” Parents also suggested that intentional collaboration between parents and organizations that support them be built to better meet the culturally specific needs of the communities they serve.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Although language is a part of many cultures, some communities are left out because culture does not always mean language.
 - Providing culturally relevant food and having staff that are representatives of the people/ community are ways to be culturally responsive to communities that are English-speaking.
 - Staff that speak the parent's language and are mindful of the way communications are sent.
 - Communication materials are distributed in different languages.
 - When an organization has board representatives that reflect the ethnicities served.
 - It was suggested that organizations coordinate and collaborate with parents who live in the neighborhoods they are trying to communicate with.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Information should be written to be culturally sensitive
 - Language used should be accessible, and the translations should be high quality.
- African American Parents:
 - Parents expressed that organizations often focus on language, and for them, communications materials targeting specific neighborhoods and places close to their homes would feel appropriate.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Communications should be written and distributed in Spanish. Participants noted that they were excited to attend the focus group session because they noted it was going to be facilitated in their language.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Expressed feelings of exclusion because they often see communication materials/ information offered in Spanish and English.
 - The attendees would like to interact with staff who are fluent in Cantonese.

- Access to culturally resonant festivities would indicate that DEC is responsive to their culture
- There should be more voices from the community and to the community.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Communications are written and distributed in Tagalog.

Accessing Early Childhood Services

Learning Question:

- **(1g) Where are families getting trusted information about early childhood?**
 - **Indicators:** Sources of trusted early childhood information

4. Discussion Question: *What organizations do you trust to give you helpful information about resources, events, and programs? Why do you trust these organizations? What in their approach (frequency, method, designs, content) resonates with you? What types of information are they sharing that meet your needs?*

Summary of Findings

- **Parents with young children rely on trusted community-based organizations for social support:** Various organizations were named as trusted sources of information and support.
 - Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents: Pediatricians, hospitals, school/childcare program, SF Public Library, YMCA, Family Talk Line, Safe & Sound, Children's Council, Wu Yee, and SOMAC.
 - Parents of Children with Special Needs: Safe & Sound, child's school or daycare, Support for Families, Richmond Neighborhood Center, SOMA Resource Center, and Compass.
 - African American Parents: Families Rising, First 5 of California, AAPC, B Magic, Mo Magic and Roots Community Organization (East Bay)
 - Spanish Speaking Parents: Good Samaritan, GLIDE, SOMA Resource Center, CARECEN, MEDA, and Homeless Prenatal.
 - Cantonese Speaking Parents: SF Public Library, Asian Women Center, Wu Yee
 - Tagalog Speaking Parents: WIC, FRCs, Mercy Housing, Children's Council, SOMCAN, Bayanihan, Filipino Senior Resource Center, and SF General Hospital physicians.

- **Trust is built through a number of factors including the act of providing ongoing support, demonstrated understanding of the needs, and professionalism exhibited by support staff.**
 - Among several groups, parents reported trusting organizations because of the types of content and resources they shared with families. Often the resources directly met an interest or vital need for the parents. For example, parents in the Spanish-speaking parent group noted organizations they trusted provided information about food banks, free diapers, and parenting advice. African American parent groups noted organizations they trust provide toolkits, training and opportunities to socialize with other families.
 - Consistent presence and communication throughout their young child's development builds trust. For example the continuous care provided by pediatricians and hospitals produces trust for some.
 - Trust is also established by the number of years an organization has been serving the community.
 - Parents reported developing strong relationships with organizations that personalize their outreach to families. Parents reported staff sharing personalized information through phone calls, and emails builds trust.
 - Parents within the African American and Cantonese speaking parent groups emphasized the importance of learning about an organization from someone in their network. When a trusted member of their community or parenting group recommends a service, program or organization, they are more likely to pursue it. Members of this group also recognize when organizations collaborate with one another, trust is built with an unfamiliar organization if they see that they collaborate with organizations they are already familiar with.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Trusted organizations include, pediatricians, hospitals, school/childcare program, SF Public Library, YMCA, Family Talk Line, Safe & Sound, Children's Council, Wu Yee, and SOMAC.
 - Parents report trusting their child's pediatrician and hospital due to the continuous care they have provided throughout their child's life. Parents also highlighted the number of years an organization has been operating in the community.
 - Parents report appreciating staff at organizations that follow up after onsite visits or initial meetings and provide personalized outreach to their families. This outreach helps to build an ongoing and consistent relationship between the family and the organization.

- Parents highlighted that it would be helpful if organizations offered in-person office hours where they could drop in and ask questions.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Trusted organizations include Safe & Sound, their child's school or daycare, Support for Families, Richmond Neighborhood Center, SOMA Resource Center, and Compass.
 - These organizations provide personable care and attention. Parents feel seen and supported.
 - The organizations develop relationships with the families they serve, and many have been in contact since their children were preschool age.
 - These organizations also host events and informative workshops for families.
- African American Parents:
 - Trusted organizations include Families Rising, First 5 of California, AAPC, B Magic, Mo Magic, and Roots Community Organization (East Bay)
 - These organizations are active in their communities. They host meetings for parents and provide tangible resources such as parent tool kits and supplies.
 - Value organizations that create community with other parents. Parents noted that they want organizations to create spaces for parents to meet, talk, and share their experiences.
 - Consistent presence and communication allow them to build trust with organizations. Once organizations build trust with the community, parents will notify other parents about the organization via word of mouth.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Trusted organizations include Good Samaritan, GLIDE, SOMA Resource Center, CARECEN, MEDA, and the Homeless Prenatal Program.
 - These organizations are trusted because they provide activities for children, socializing events for parents, resources, and parenting workshops. Parents also report feeling comfortable visiting these organizations because they are able to learn how to navigate school systems and how to obtain services for mental health.
 - Parents appreciate when staff at community-based organizations and public agencies are well-trained and professional. For example, a parent reported trusting the Good Samaritan organization because they have many staff members who are prepared to help families with

their children's developmental needs, suggest activities, and provide parents with information that helps them become better parents.

- Parents report seeking information on food banks, free diapers, and general assistance.
 - Parents also report that they seek out organizations that are focused on supporting families. They offer wrap-around services for all members of the family and not just children. They have found organizations that offer support with renounce navigation, reunification, and financial assistance with bills and food to be helpful.
 - Organizations that offer assistance to families with children at different stages/ ages of their lives are key.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Trusted organizations include SF Public Library, Asian Women Center, Wu Yee Yee
 - Parents trust these organizations because they were recommended to them by other parents (i.e., by word of mouth), they provide activities for children, and they often collaborate with other organizations in the community they are familiar with.
 - These organizations also provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services and outreach materials such as flyers and events.
 - Parents shared they gained knowledge about some of these organizations through Cantonese language TV channels.
 - Parents shared they built trust with organizations because they met their child's needs and demonstrated professionalism.
 - Needs include offering resources such as diapers, parent education materials, and free events with freebies for children and parents.
 - Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Trusted organizations include WIC, FRCs, Mercy Housing, Children's Council, SOMCAN, Bayanihan, Filipino Senior Resource Center, and SF General Hospital physicians.
 - Parents trust these organizations because they have received support for many years and find that these organizations are ready to share resources that meet their evolving needs.

Learning Question:

- **(3b)** How can DEC build trust with parents?
 - **Indicators:** Methods to increase parents' trust in DEC

5. Discussion Question: *What should DEC prioritize to help them build trust and credibility with parents like you and your community?*

Summary of Findings

- **Demonstrate attentiveness to the needs of each target demographic group/community.**
 - Be clear when something is feasible and will move forward, and do the same for items that are not feasible and can not move forward.
 - Demonstrate transparency in what to expect when applying for childcare, including the waitlist process. Parents are interested in the idea of increasing the income threshold at daycare centers and the number of children they can accept.
- **Develop and maintain an active presence in communities across San Francisco.**
 - Attend community events like the Pop-up Village. Engage with families at events by walking up and talking with them and hearing their stories and needs.
 - Gather information about the needs of specific communities (at the neighborhood level) and provide a space for open dialogue and sharing.
 - When possible, build personal relationships with families in the community.
- **Centralize materials and information about resources so they are accessible to all families.**
 - Become the place where new families (new to the region and/or first-time parents) first seek information about services and supports.
 - Materials should provide resources and information on supporting children with special needs.
 - Resources related to the well-being of families.
- **Embed antiracist approaches to DEC's communications efforts**
 - Be mindful of the tone and language used. Kind and inviting tones build trust and strengthen relationships.
 - Use language that is easy to understand, and grounded in the vocabulary of the community.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Trust in DEC will be built when parents see that there is accountability and transparency. When an idea or topic is discussed with families in forums such as focus groups, DEC should later inform families of the tangible results of the conversation. If the ideas or approaches are actionable and were

implemented, inform parents. If the ideas and approaches are not feasible, share an update with the community so they are aware.

- Parents noted that DEC can build trust by explaining the childcare waitlist process.
- Parents suggested that DEC representatives attend community events and meet community members and listen to their stories and experiences. Community events such as Pop-up Villages were recommended.
- Parents recommend embedding anti-racist practices in DEC communications and approaches.
- To build trust, the language and tone used in communications and interactions should be kind and inviting.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - DEC can host child-friendly events and educational workshops to engage with parents.
 - Parents shared they would like to see DEC implement relationship-building approaches with families. This can include following up and checking in with families via phone, or email.
- African American Parents:
 - Communication regarding events happening in different neighborhoods is appealing. They appreciate flyers, billboards, and large images rather than electronic communications.
 - Parents expressed that DEC should gather information on the needs of specific communities (at the local neighborhood level) and provide a space for them to have the freedom to speak, learn, and share their experiences.
 - It was recommended that DEC incorporate communications via flyers, billboards, and large posters rather than electronic communications alone.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Parents expressed they want organizations to be attentive to their needs and hear them when they express concerns or requests for resources.
 - Parents expressed that staff organization employees can positively or negatively affect the level of trust they have in the organization. Trust is built when the staff they interact with are trained and knowledgeable about the issue area being discussed, and are friendly.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Prioritize increasing the income threshold at daycare centers and the number of children they can accept.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - There is a need for knowledge, especially as new parents. Attendees stated that educational materials and information for new parents coming from DEC would be helpful.

- Parents would also like resources and information on how to support children with special needs.
- Parents also requested materials that help them discuss topics such as homelessness and crime with their children. These materials should be placed in a central location that can be physical or online.

Learning Question:

- **(3c)** How do parents want to be involved in DEC processes and decision-making? What types of formats can you/do you want to participate in? (Short term and especially long-term)
 - **Indicators:** Preferred parent engagement types; Preferred short-term engagement roles; Preferred long-term engagement roles

6. Discussion Question: *DEC wants to continue to engage families and continually improve the organization by seeking the opinions and experiences of San Francisco families with young children. How would you like to get involved?*

Summary of Findings

- **Surveys and focus groups are the most popular engagement option:** Across all groups is an overwhelming preference to continue engaging with DEC through focus groups and surveys. Considerations raised by parents across groups include:
 - Tagalog-speaking parent groups requested that focus group opportunities occur during school/child care hours.
 - Multi-ethnic English-speaking parents expressed a preference to participate in meetings in the evenings outside of business hours. They also emphasized the importance of compensating participants for the time and willingness to share their experiences.
 - Surveys and focus groups are seen by some as opportunities to provide feedback and ensure input reaches appropriate personnel.
 - A parent in the African American parent group explained that perspectives of young children are valuable and encouraged the collection of young children's thoughts.
- **Length of a touch point is a potential factor for the types of engagement opportunities that are most popular:** Parents shared that quick and easy engagement opportunities are preferred, especially for those that have limited or

non-flexible time throughout the day. This preference may be related to why there was a limited amount of expressed interest in engaging in a more robust fashion through task forces, parent advisory boards, and parent ambassador/navigators. Interest in time-intensive engagement opportunities were selected by 1-2 parents per focus group.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Parents would like to participate in engagement opportunities that are quick and easy such as surveys.
 - Openness to participate in events that are family-friendly and hosted during the weekend.
 - Parents emphasized that input and engagement opportunities, like surveys and focus groups, should be compensated for their time.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - The majority of parents shared that they would like to participate in focus groups and surveys.
 - A few parents shared they would like to join a parent task force or parent leader groups hosted by DEC.
- African American Parents:
 - Preference for participating in focus groups and complete surveys.
 - One parent expressed the idea of inviting children to share their thoughts and perspectives.
 - Other parents expressed interest in joining a parent or caregiver task force or having a parent ambassador or navigator program.
 - Parents also expressed that newsletters, toolkits, and social media interactions are helpful ways to remain engaged.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - The majority of parents prefer completing surveys, and attending parent events, and workshop opportunities.
 - Some parents preferred to participate in focus groups.
 - Expressed interest in obtaining tool kits, and mail (i.e, pamphlets) from DEC.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Preferred methods of engagement are focus groups and surveys because they are seen as direct ways to provide input.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - All parents stated they were interested in participating in focus groups. They requested the sessions be held in the daytime while their kids are at school/daycare and that DEC provide compensation for attending.

- Parents noted that they would complete surveys and would prefer to do them in an in-person setting where the surveys are collected after completion. Some reported that they would forget to complete the survey if they were to take it home.
- A few attendees expressed interest in participating in a parent advisory group but would require interpretation/ language support if the sessions were not held in Tagalog.

Experiences Raising Children in San Francisco

Learning Question:

- **(4c)** What makes raising a child in San Francisco great? (Despite all the challenges, why do you choose to stay in SF and raise your child here?)
 - **Indicators:** Factors that influence parents' ability to raise children in San Francisco

7. Discussion Question: *Why are you raising your children in San Francisco?*

Summary of Findings

- **Resources and Social Supports:** A common reason for raising children in San Francisco shared across all groups was the availability and variety of resources, benefits, and social supports that parents can access to support their families.
- **Hometown and Family Support:** Many groups, including African American parents, Parents with Children who have special needs, and the multi-ethnic English-speaking parent group, noted that they continue to reside in the City because they were either born and raised in the city and/or have family that still lives in the City and see familial support as vital to their families' success.
- **Diversity:** Others spoke about the diversity of people and cultures in the city. The effect of diversity differed among participant groups.
 - A parent in the African American parent group stated that they want their children to be bilingual and live in a city with high language diversity, some of which is reflected in early care and education and elementary school programming.
 - Parents in the Cantonese-speaking parent group noted a significant Chinese and Mandarin-speaking population in San Francisco which supports acclimation and navigation of services and supports.
 - Stemming from diversity is the city's inclusive and tolerant nature. This, in a parent's opinion, leads to less racism and discrimination that is faced.

- Others spoke to the vast number of activities and events for children and feelings of inclusion of all families regardless of abilities, weather in the region, convenient public transportation, their employment is based in the city, along with their home and child's care and graduate education.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Parents shared they are raising their children in San Francisco due to the resources available, such as free city college and free events.
 - San Francisco is their place of employment.
 - Family members live in San Francisco, and they provide support.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Family members currently live in the city.
 - They were born and raised in San Francisco and consider the region home.
 - Currently completing a graduate degree in the City.
 - The city has a lot of activities and events for children, and there is an emphasis on the inclusion of all families of all abilities.
- African American Parents:
 - They were born and raised in San Francisco and have the personal desire to continue living in the city.
 - Interest in their children becoming bilingual.
 - The number of opportunities and resources in San Francisco.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - There are many resources and supports that are geared toward the Hispanic and Latino populations.
 - There are educational resources and free college.
 - There is freedom.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - There is a large Chinese and Mandarin-speaking population, and this allows for easier acclimation and navigation.
 - Limited experiences of racism and discrimination.
 - Since San Francisco is a large metropolitan city, there are more resources and schools to choose from.
 - Public transportation is convenient.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - The weather.
 - Availability of benefits and resources for families.

8. Discussion Question: *As parents of young children, what makes living in San Francisco great? What makes it challenging?*

Summary of Findings

- When asked what makes living in San Francisco *great*, the parents' **explanation for what makes living in San Francisco greatly mirrored their reasons for choosing to raise their children in the city**. The following explanations were common among many groups:
 - The diversity of people in San Francisco and the city's accepting nature which leads to parents experiencing less discrimination due to their ethnicity.
 - Availability of resources and welfare supports
 - Public transportation
 - Presence of outdoor parks, playgrounds, and free events
- When asked what makes living in San Francisco *challenging*, the following themes arose:
 - **Attaining Child Care:** With the exception of Spanish speaking participants, all other groups noted the cost of child care, locating and securing a spot for their child, and navigating waitlists as commonly experienced barriers.
 - **Cost of Living:** With the exception of Spanish-speaking participants, all other groups expressed that the cost of living is high and specifically named the increasing costs of housing, food, and taxes as challenging aspects of raising children in San Francisco.
 - **Safety:** Cantonese-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Tagalog-speaking parent groups and Parents of Children with Special Needs explained the stress they experience related to the unhoused in the city. Many referenced feeling unsafe traveling through the city partly due to the unhoused, some of whom experience mental health challenges. Others spoke about crimes, violence, and drug use by people in their neighborhoods.

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Positives:
 - Due to the city's public transportation, the city is a great place to raise a family if you do not have a car or are not able to drive due to high parking costs.
 - There are free events throughout the year.
 - Access to parks and playgrounds suitable for young children.

- Good weather.
- Challenges:
 - Childcare is expensive, and the waitlist process is challenging. Parents noted that free or low-cost childcare would make a significant difference.
 - Noted that childcare workers should be paid a living wage so they can stay in the field and keep childcare slots open.
 - A single mother of two reported working overtime to make ends meet and noted that the cost of living is high.
- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - Positives:
 - Diversity of people living in San Francisco.
 - Availability of resources.
 - Presence of local family members who can support child-rearing.
 - Access to outdoor parks.
 - Challenges
 - Homelessness in the city.
 - Cost of living and housing costs.
 - Cost of childcare.
- African American Parents:
 - Positives
 - San Francisco schools provide many resources and referrals to organizations to support working parents.
 - San Francisco is diverse and accepting. As a result, parents reported that they experience less discrimination related to their race and ethnicity.
 - Challenges
 - The availability of programs such as sports for their children is limited. Often, spots for programs fill up quickly.
 - The cost of programs and activities can be a barrier for some.
 - The cost of living is high, and meeting the income threshold for support and resources can be difficult for some.
 - Difficulty accessing childcare. Parents expressed frustrations with long wait times on waitlists and lack of transparency about how and when parents are awarded childcare support.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - Positives
 - Access to parks and social services, such as resources to support their families.

- Enjoy that San Francisco is a tourist destination with many things to do with their families each week.
- Challenges
 - Public transportation is not easily accessible to some, and those without cars find it difficult to navigate the city.
 - Parents highlighted the challenges related to homelessness, mental health, crime, and drug use in public spaces near their homes. Parents shared that it can be stressful to leave the house due to the unhoused population.
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - Positives
 - Appreciate the social support offered.
 - Challenges
 - The current political climate and safety concerns.
 - The cost of living, high taxes, and expensive rent.
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Positives
 - Availability of resources for families.
 - Challenges
 - Homelessness, drugs, and violence in communities are challenging.
 - Parents shared that the cost of childcare is expensive, as well as food and shelter.
 - Parents suggested that DEC coordinate with the Children's Council to increase the income limit.

Other/ Miscellaneous

9. Discussion Question: *Before we close for the evening, we'd like to open the floor to any other comments, ideas, or suggestions that you all have as parents of young children. Is there anything else that we haven't touched on today that DEC should be aware of as they plan how to reach and support families like yours across San Francisco?*

Findings by Focus Group

- Multi-ethnic English Speaking Parents:
 - Parents highlighted the need for community/neighborhood-specific events.
 - Parents highlighted the need for weekend childcare.

- Parents of Children with Special Needs:
 - N/A
- African American Parents:
 - Several parents expressed concerns regarding discrimination experiences while on waiting listings for child care. Parents reported experiencing or hearing that there is a maximum number of Black and African American children that are admitted to some childcare sites.
 - Parents want to send their children to culturally responsive daycare centers and sites.
 - Communities such as Treasure Island, Little Hollywood, and Hilltop should be intentionally included in communication and outreach efforts. Parents report feeling that these communities are often overlooked.
 - Parents highlighted obtaining school bus transportation is complicated and inconsistent.
 - A few parents expressed interest in being able to sign up to receive resources and materials from DEC.
- Spanish Speaking Parents:
 - N/A
- Cantonese Speaking Parents:
 - N/A
- Tagalog Speaking Parents:
 - Parents emphasized the need for specific support for immigrants who are new to the region and need support navigating public institutions and programs.

5. DEC Digital Parent Survey Findings

Department of Early Childhood (DEC) Digital Parent Survey Findings

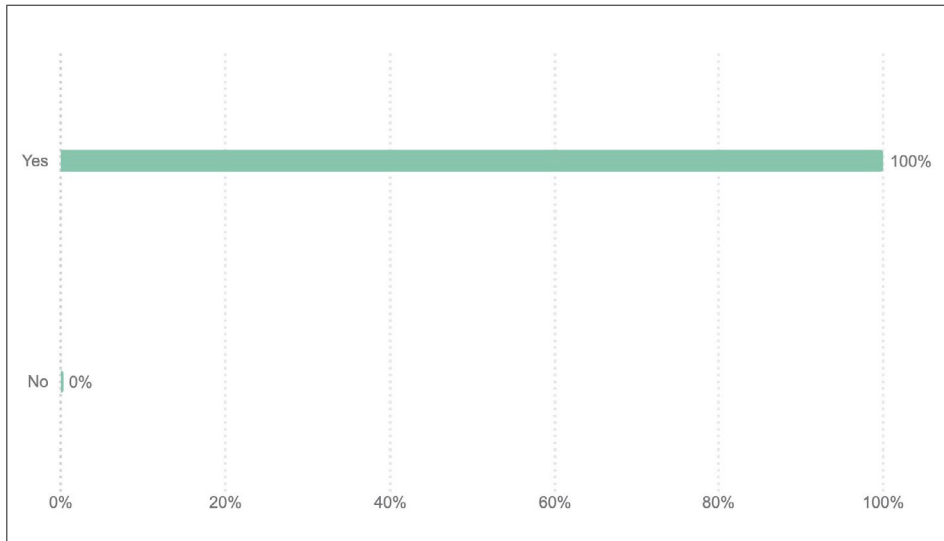
Compiled October 13th, 2023

Responses by Survey Language

Language	# of respondents
English (EN)	747
Chinese (ZH-T)	508
Spanish (ES-ES)	417
Vietnamese (VI)	2
Arabic (AR)	1
Tagalog (TGL)	1
Total	1676

1. Do you live in San Francisco? (single select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.



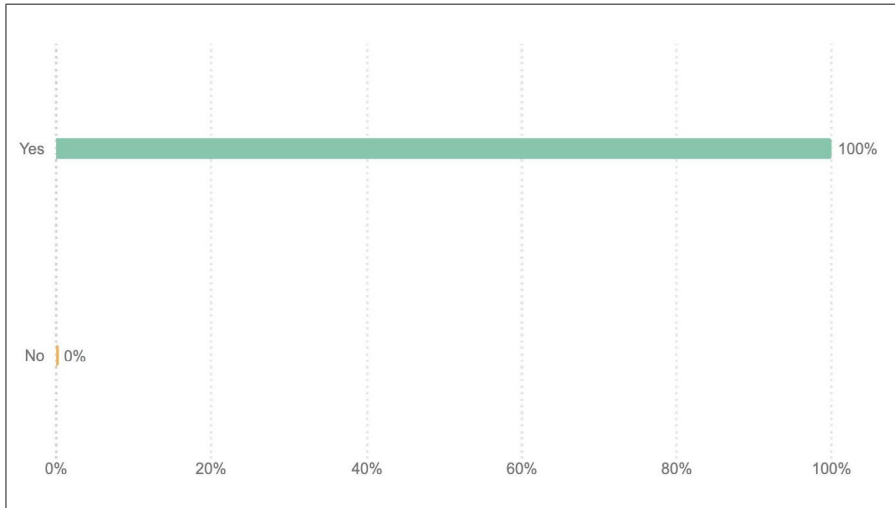
If Q1 = yes

2. What is your zip code of residence in San Francisco County? (number entry)

There were 1,676 responses to this question. The majority of respondents resided in 94112, 94124, 94134, 94110, and 94103. See complete list [here](#).

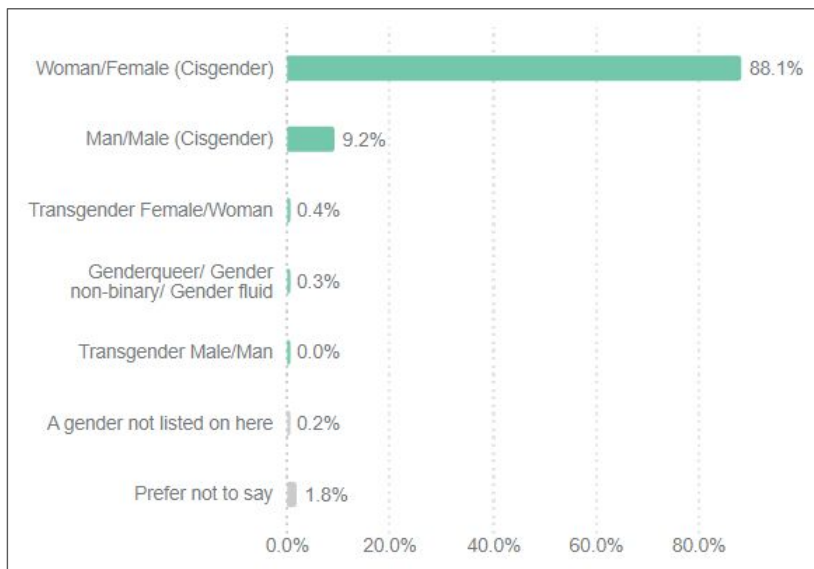
3. Are you the parent or caregiver of a child ages 0 - 7 or are you pregnant/expecting a child? (single select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.

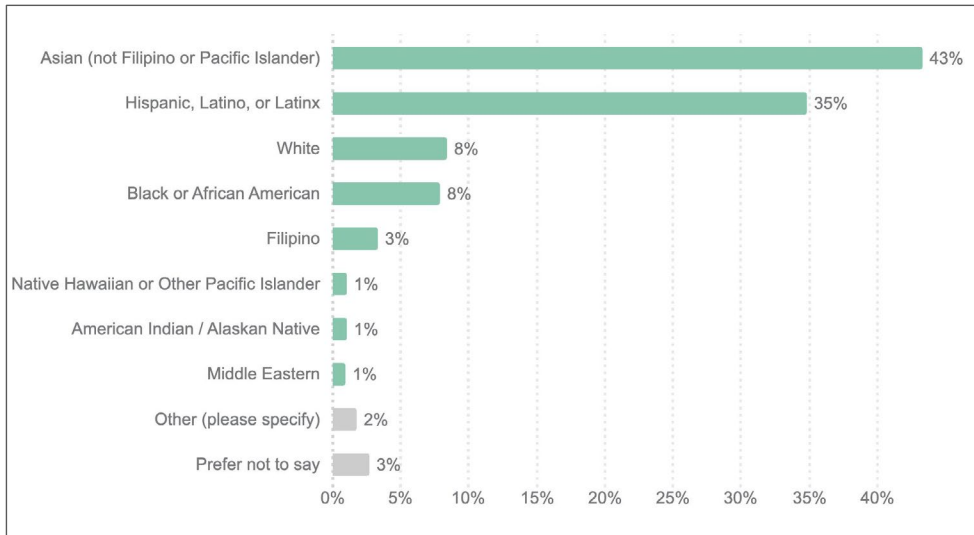


4. Which of these best describe your gender identity? (single select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.



5. What is your race/ethnicity? You can pick more than one. (multiple select)
There were 1,676 responses to this question.



5. What is your race/ethnicity? You can pick more than one. (multiple select)
Below are the "Other" text-entry responses (22).

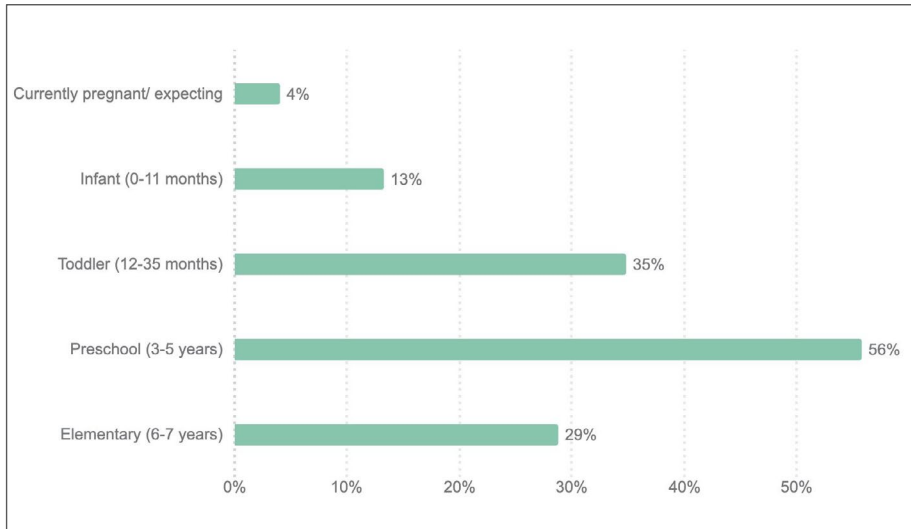
Mongolia
Latino
Nepali
中国
Arab
中国人
中国人
Jewish

Latin /white
Moroccan
Mixed
Brazilian native
chinese
汉族
North african
Mixed

Native american
Mexicana
Latina
Latino
Chinese
Latino

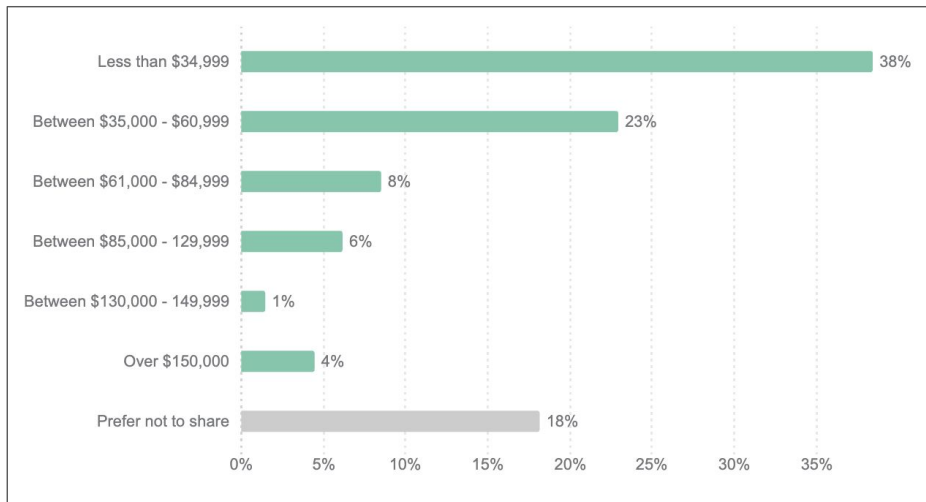
6. Please select all the age groups for your children who are under the age of 8.
(multiple select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.



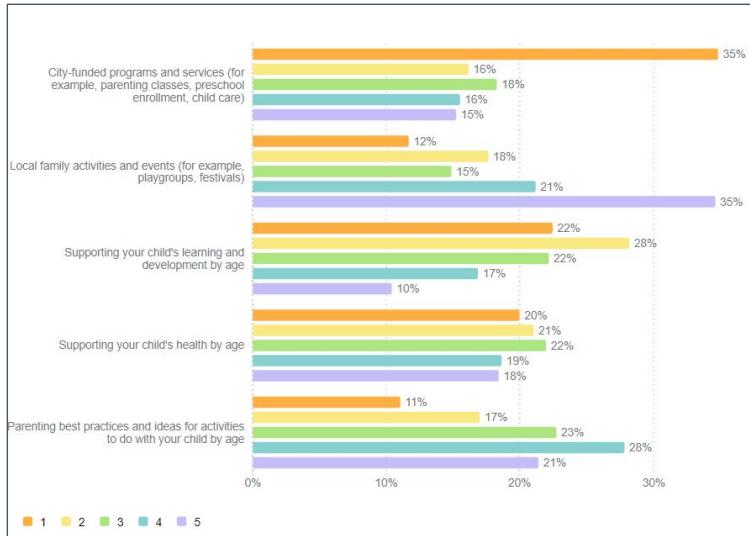
7. What is your annual household income? Please select the range that includes the income of all earners in your household that is used to support your child(ren).
(single select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.

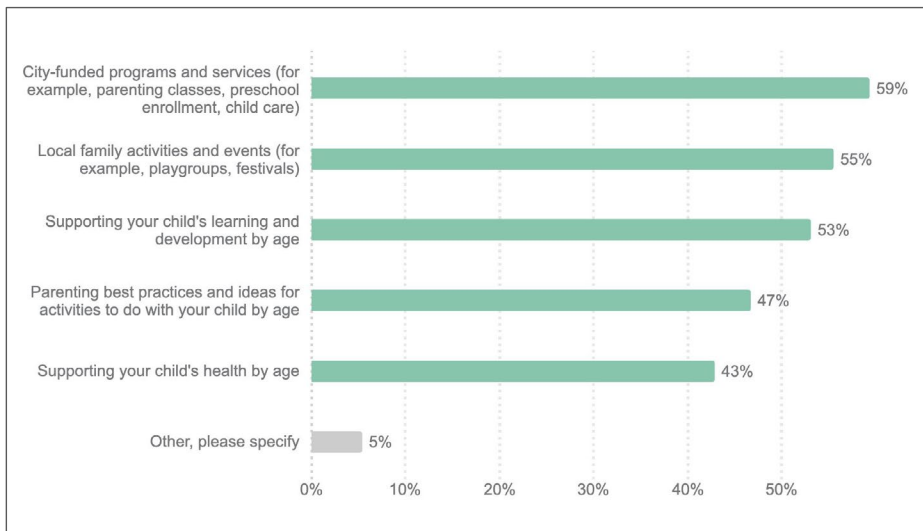


8. Please rank the types of information you could receive from DEC from highest to lowest priority. To begin, drag them into your order of preference. (rank select)

There were 1,677 responses to this question.



9. Is there information you wish you could receive about parenting and early childhood that you don't already have access to? Select all that apply. (multiple select) *There were 1,676 responses to this question.*

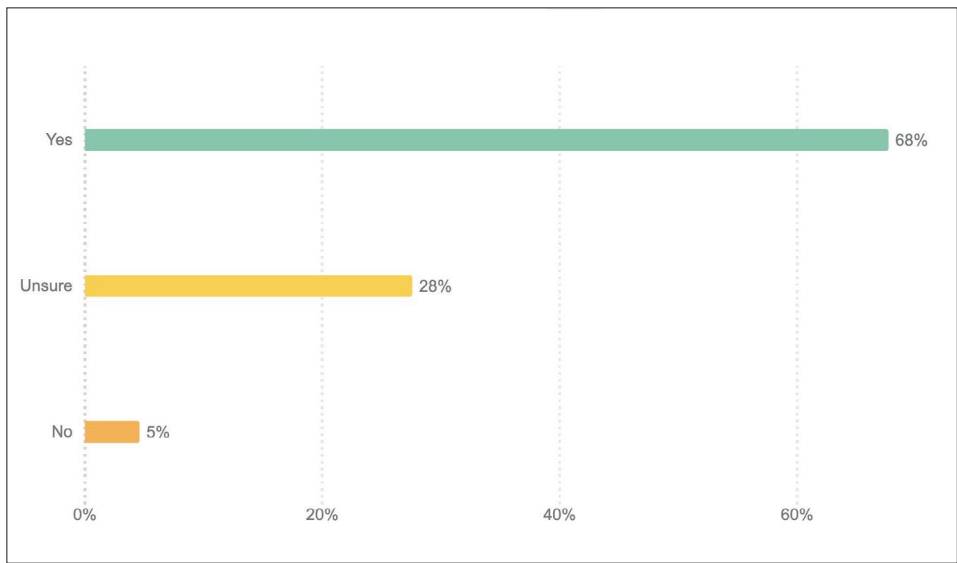


9. Is there information you wish you could receive about parenting and early childhood that you don't already have access to? Select all that apply. (multiple select)

*There were 1,676 responses to this question.
See the complete list of the "Other" text-entry responses (52) [here](#).*

10. Would you sign up to receive information from DEC? (single select)

There were 1,676 responses to this question.



[Crosstab Analysis:](#)
[Click here to review responses by demographic breakdowns](#)

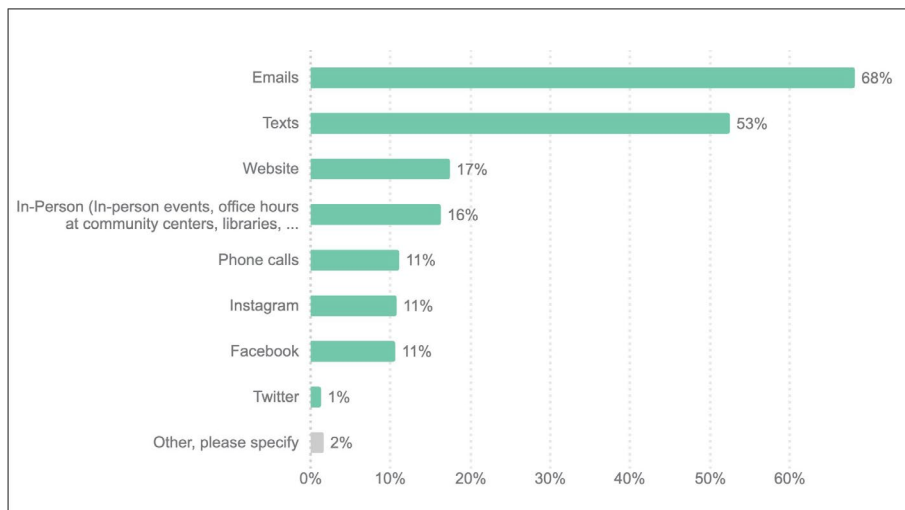
(if Q10 = no)

11. Why would you decline to receive information from DEC? (text entry)

There were 78 responses to this question. See the complete list of the text-entry responses [here](#).

12. What is the best way for DEC to share information with you? Select all that apply. (multiple select)

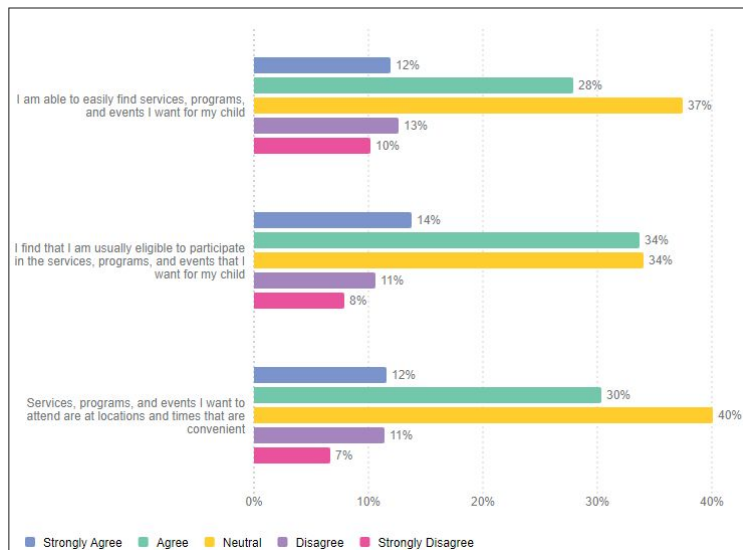
There were 1,676 responses to this question.



12. What is the best way for DEC to share information with you? Select all that apply. (multiple select)
Attached are the "Other" text-entry responses (18).

Through a DEC app designed for parents or similar community based app
微信公众平台
News letter
Don't
Wasap
朋友
WeChat
Libraries have been an AMAZING resource!
zoom meeting
Serranodouglas17.10@gmail.com
Wechat
dedicated app or a community group using a platform other than Facebook
Thru teachers
local library and medical offices and park posting and parks rec center and schools

13. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements. (matrix select)
There were 1,477 responses to this question.



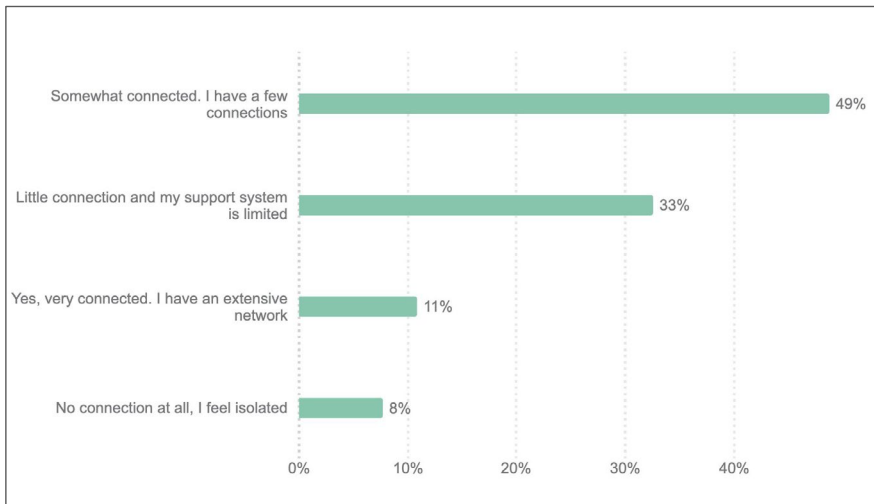
Crosstab Analysis:
[Click here to review responses by demographic breakdowns](#)

14. What do you want DEC to know about raising children in San Francisco, including the needs of your family and community? (text entry)

There were 1,477 responses to this question. See the complete list of the text-entry responses [here](#).

15. Do you feel connected to other families with young children in San Francisco? (single select)

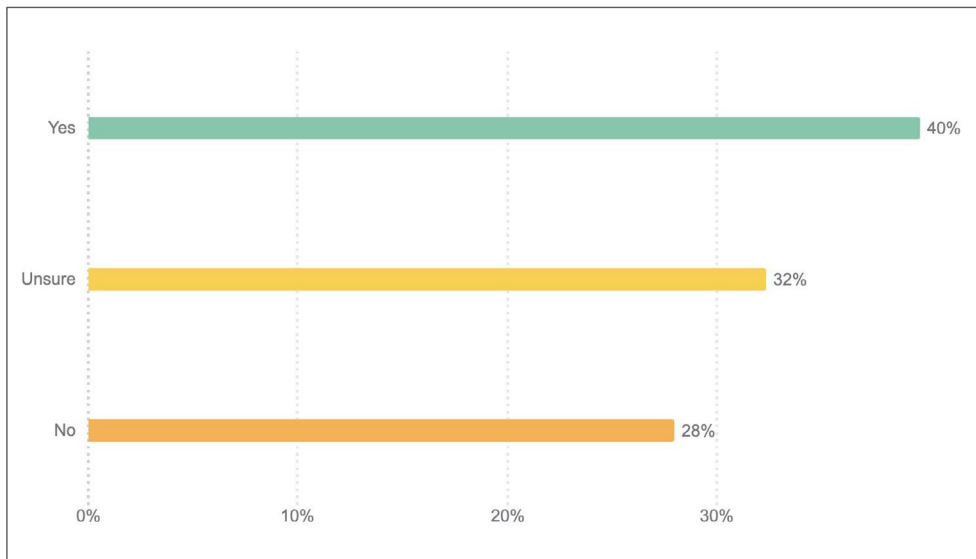
There were 1,459 responses to this question.



[Crosstabs Analysis:](#)
Click here to review responses by demographic breakdowns

16. Do you want help forming connections with other families? (single select)

There were 1,459 responses to this question.



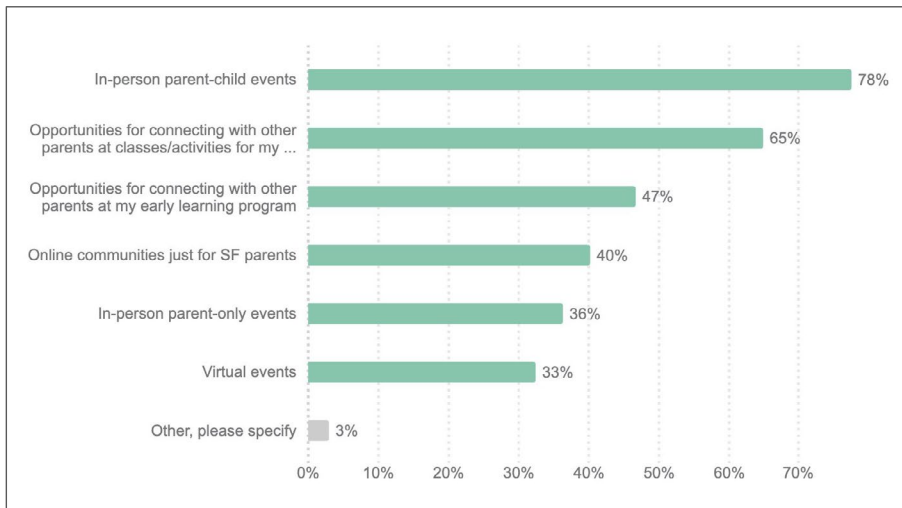
[Crosstab Analysis](#): Click here to review responses by demographic breakdowns

(if Q16 = yes)

17. What opportunities would help you form the connections you are seeking?

Select all that apply. (multiple select)

There were 547 responses to this question.



(if Q16 = yes)

17. What opportunities would help you form the connections you are seeking? Select all that apply.

(multiple select)

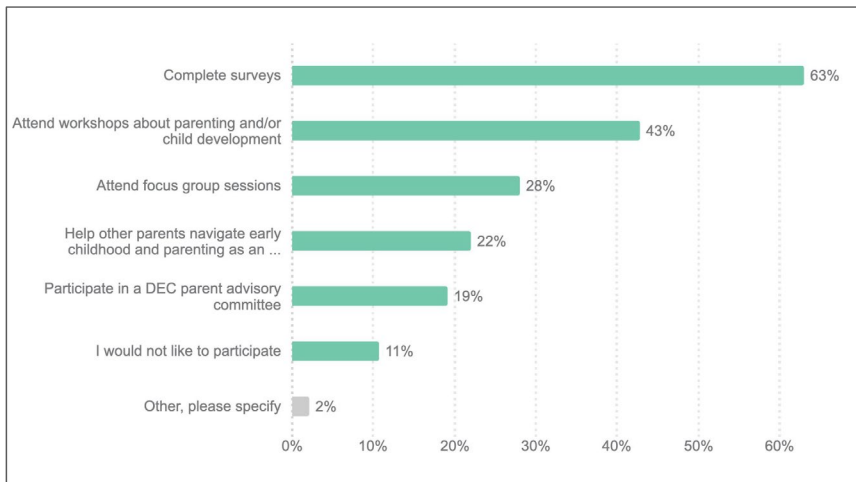
Attached are the "Other" text-entry responses (12).

Please don't attempt to recreate existing online communities like Main Street Mamas on Facebook or Families Free Sharing on Facebook (check them out for research). These are working quite well and I don't feel there is a need for another online community. In-person and in the evening please!! Parents that work full time really want to bring their kids to activities too!

- In person parent only with childcare
- connecting with solo parents with more than one child
- Christian based events
- Opportunities for connecting with parents that are in my age group
- Activities for families with children with special needs
- Outdoor family-friendly events
- Cuidado para niños después de clases
- Groups for children with autism
- A program for immigrant Hispanic parents
- Playdates
- Community building events doesn't have to focus on family could be planting trees together or creating a mural together

18. DEC wants to continue to engage families and continually improve the organization by seeking the opinions, thoughts, and experiences of SF families with young children. If you are interested, please share how you would like to get involved. (multiple select)

There were 1,400 responses to this question.



18. DEC wants to continue to engage families and continually improve the organization by seeking the opinions, thoughts, and experiences of SF families with young children. If you are interested, please share how you would like to get involved. (multiple select)
Attached are the “Other” text-entry responses (10).

Different neighborhoods have existing support networks for parents (eg PreFund Potrero Hill). I would encourage leaning into what is working today and how DEC can support the community rather than starting from scratch. Share best practices for example.
play , storytime, music, art, etc events for parents and kids
Community based organizations who hire from inside the actual community
Necesito más información
Collaborative design and community listening sessions
多组织亲子交流活动, 了解家长的意见和建议
Me gustaria que tuvieran programas virtuales
No
I'm not sure which direction to take honestly
Zoom meetings, new COVID strain on the rise.

19. The first 300 San Francisco based parents and caregivers with at least 1 child ages 0-7 years old to fully complete this survey will be given a \$10 e-gift card. If you are a part of the first 300 you will receive an e-gift card within 14 business days. (text entry for name, email, and phone number)

There were 1,278 responses to this question. See the complete list of the text-entry responses [here](#).

20. Would you like to stay connected with the Department of Early Childhood?
(single select)

There were 1,265 responses to this question.

