

Informing child care on the San Mateo County Coasts



A study of parents' child care and
development needs



This study was initiated and supported by Coastside Children’s Programs. Support was also provided by the San Mateo County Office of Education and the San Mateo County Human Services Agency. We thank them and acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the supporters.



Table of Contents

- Executive Summary v
- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Background and Context: Child Care on the Coastside 2
- 3. Methodology 4
 - 3.1 Parent Survey 5
 - 3.2 Parent Focus Groups 6
- 4. Findings 7
 - 4.1 Parent Demographics 8
 - 4.1.1 Ethnicity 8
 - 4.1.2 Income 8
 - 4.1.3 Work Status 9
 - 4.1.4 Household Make-up 9
 - 4.1.5 Children’s Ages 10
 - 4.2 Parent Experiences and Perceptions 10
 - 4.2.1 Child Care Arrangements 10
 - 4.2.2 Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement 15
 - 4.2.3 Satisfaction With and Importance of Specific Aspects of Formal Care 19
 - 4.2.4 Child Care Information and Resources 21
- 5. Opportunities 24
 - 5.1 Policy Makers 24
 - 5.2 Support Organizations 24
 - 5.3 Child Care Providers 25
 - 5.4 Schools and Districts 25
 - 5.5 Parents 25
- 6. Conclusions 26
- References 27

List of Tables

Table 1. Number Eligible, Percent Underserved and Subsidy Priorities By Community	3
Table 2. Geographic Breakdown of Survey Participants.....	6
Table 3. Geographic Breakdown of Focus Group Participants.....	7
Table 4. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Ethnicity.....	8
Table 5. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Household Income.....	9
Table 6. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Work Status	9
Table 7. Breakdown of Spouse/Partner’s Work Status.....	9
Table 8. Breakdown of Survey Participants’ Household Make-Up.....	10
Table 9. Breakdown of Children’s Ages	10
Table 10. Breakdown of Type of Care Used.....	11
Table 11. Breakdown of Type of Care Used By Ethnicity.....	12
Table 12. Breakdown of Type of Care Used By Income Level.....	12
Table 13. Likelihood of Using Formal Care By Type of Care.....	13
Table 14. Percent Very Likely or Likely to Use Formal Care By Ethnicity and Type of Care	13
Table 15. Percent Very Likely or Likely to Use Formal Care By Income Level and Type of Care	14
Table 16. Fee/Tuition Arrangement for Formal Child Care.....	15
Table 17. Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement	15
Table 18. Percent Satisfied or Very Satisfied By Type of Care.....	15
Table 19. Desire to Change to Another Child Care Arrangement	17
Table 21. Child Care Challenges Experienced During the Past Year.....	18
Table 22. Satisfaction With Specific Aspects of Child Care.....	19
Table 23. Importance Attributed By Parents To Various Aspects of Child Care	20
Table 24. Preferred Site for Preschool.....	21
Table 25. Breakdown of Preferred Site for Preschool By Ethnicity.....	21
Table 26. Source of Information About Child Care Provider	22

Executive Summary

There is limited knowledge regarding the child care needs of parents on the San Mateo County Coastside. That which does exist suggests grave shortages of licensed child care spaces in San Mateo County's Mid and South Coastside regions (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). In the Mid Coast, the population of children 0-13 years of age is estimated at 5,399, with 71 percent living within a family that consists of two working parents or a single working parent. Yet, the number of spaces in licensed family child care homes totaled 362, while the number of full-time spaces in licensed child care centers totaled 248, and the number of part-time spaces totaled 363 (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). For the South Coast, the population of children 0-13 years of age numbers 478, of whom approximately 69 percent live in a family with two working parents or a single working parent. The number of spaces in licensed child care homes totaled 38, while the number of full-time spaces in licensed child care centers totaled zero, and the number of part-time spaces totaled 103 (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000).

In light of existing data indicating shortfalls in meeting child care and development needs for Coastside families, the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) conducted a study to explore child care and development needs among Coastside parents in greater depth. The specific aim of the study has been to determine whether and how parents are currently meeting their child care needs, as well as their perceived successes and challenges with their current care arrangements. Data were gathered for the study through a survey with Spanish and English speaking parents, specifically in the Mid and South Coastside communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Half Moon Bay, Pescadero, La Honda, and San Gregorio. Subsequently, four focus groups were conducted with a subset of the survey participants, in several of the Mid and South Coastside communities. Working through multiple channels including local media, elementary schools, community centers, county organizations, online parent groups, and child care providers, this study seeks to contribute to the growth of public knowledge regarding Coastside child care, and to improved child care services and resources for Coastside families.

Findings

The findings that follow are from ISKME's analysis of survey data from 541 parents, representing 792 Coastside children, ages 0-12. The findings also include analysis of data from four focus groups with a total of 23 parents, most of whom completed the survey.

Child Care Arrangements

- *Parents use a mix of types of care to meet their needs.* Overall, parents draw on a combination of types of care for each of their children, including both formal care options and informal care options. The most commonly reported type on the survey was informal care, which includes care by parents themselves, by relatives, and by non relatives (72 percent), followed by formal, center-based care, which includes infant and toddler, preschool, and after elementary school care (52 percent), and licensed family child care homes (11

percent). Focus groups indicated that parents seek additional solutions usually because one type of care does not meet all child care needs.

- *Predominant type of care varies by parent/child populations.* The survey revealed that a higher percentage of Caucasian children (71 percent) were enrolled in infant and toddler and preschool care than Latino children (20 percent). A much higher percentage of Caucasian children (85 percent) were also in licensed family child care homes than Latino children (3 percent). The only type of care that Latino children were reported to be in more of was care by a non relative (53 percent for Latino children and 41 percent for Caucasian children). In terms of income level, a much lower percentage of middle-income children (11 percent) and low income children (25 percent) were reported to be in infant and toddler care and preschool than high income children (65 percent).
- *Cost, convenience, and perceptions about children's welfare and development influence child care choices.* Across all types of care, the most common factors reported on the survey (open-ended responses) were cost and convenience. For informal types of care, other factors cited include beliefs that children are better off when raised by family or other trustworthy individuals, followed by perceptions that informal care provides a more caring environment for children. Parents using infant and toddler care and preschool also frequently cited opportunities for child socialization and preparation for kindergarten as factors; homework assistance emerged as a key reason for choosing after-elementary school care. In the case of licensed family child care homes, a home-like environment and the quality of care were cited as additional factors.

Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement

- *Overall, parents are satisfied with their current child care arrangement.* On average, across all types of care, parents indicated on the survey that they are satisfied with their current child care arrangement for the majority of children (87 percent). The percentage of those satisfied were highest for infant and toddler, preschool, and parental-based care, which were all at approximately 92 percent.
- *However, for some parent populations and for some types of care, satisfaction with current child care arrangements was less.* Low-income parents expressed the least overall satisfaction with their child care arrangements on the survey, when comparing level of satisfaction by income level. When comparing level of satisfaction by type of care used, parents using care by an older sibling and by a non relative were the least satisfied. Parents in the South Coastside region reported less overall satisfaction with current child care arrangements than parents in the Mid Coastside region.
- *Overall, a low percentage of parents want to change to another child care arrangement, excepting certain types of informal care.* For 64 percent of the children represented on the survey, parents did not want to change to another type of arrangement; an interest in changing to another arrangement was reported for only 19 percent, while uncertainty about whether they would like to make a change was reported for the remaining 17 percent. The

percentage of those wanting to change increased when looking specifically at care by an older sibling (32 percent) or by a non relative (36 percent).

- *For those parents who do want to make a change to another arrangement, lower cost, closer location, and enhanced child development opportunities were prominent reasons.* For children in informal care, the primary reason for wanting to change cited on the survey (open-ended responses) and in focus groups was enhanced opportunities for their children’s development, either academically, socially, or culturally through arts enrichment activities at formal care providers. For children in formal care (both center-based and family child care homes), a convenient, closer location, and lower cost surfaced as prominent reasons for wanting to change to another arrangement.
- *Factors preventing parents from changing to another child care arrangement included cost, location, and availability of child care spaces.* For all types of child care, cost, location, and lack of available spaces in a preferred child care option were cited as common reasons for not making a change on the survey (open-ended responses).
- *Affordability and scheduling reported as the most common child care challenges.* The most common child care challenge reported on the survey and in the focus groups was the high cost of care, followed by difficulties in finding care to match work schedules. Regarding cost, the majority of parents reported that they pay full tuition (80 percent) for child care, while a lower percentage of parents receive government assistance (6 percent), a reduced rate from provider (4 percent), fee assistance from employer (2 percent), scholarship (2 percent), or “other” fee arrangements (8 percent).

Satisfaction with and Importance of Specific Aspects of Formal Care

- *Overall, parents employing formal care indicated satisfaction with all aspects.* The survey revealed parental satisfaction with all aspects of formal child care. Parents were most highly satisfied with the location of the child care facility, languages spoken by staff, staff experience and staff-parent communication. The focus groups also revealed high satisfaction with how formal care providers treated children, specifically in terms of fostering a feeling that each child is an individual.
- *Overall, parents employing formal care indicated all aspects are important.* The most important factors of formal care as reported by parents on the survey include communication between staff and parents and activities promoting social skills.
- *Importance placed on specific aspects of formal care varies by parent populations.* Whereas student-teacher ratio was reported on the survey as a more important aspect of formal care by Caucasian parents, cost, full-time scheduling, a facility connected to schools, homework assistance, academic development and sports activities were reported as more important by Latino parents than by Caucasian parents.

Child Care Information and Resources

- *Friends and other parents are primary information sources for child care options.* Parents most commonly found out about their current child care provider through a friend (58 percent). Other sources of information included: a local parent group (12 percent), community center (11 percent) and the Internet (5 percent).
- *Online discussion groups, community bulletin boards and public parks facilitate parental connections around child care.* Focus groups revealed that parents with Internet access sought child care information through parent-initiated online discussion groups (such as Coastside Mothers' Club and GreenMoms), in addition to local meeting places, such as playgrounds. Community bulletin boards provided information for parents in rural areas, such as La Honda. Parents without access to the Internet indicated that they sought information about child care from fellow parents and from community centers (such as Puente Community Resource Center in Pescadero).
- *Parents want additional ways to find out about child care and to connect with other parents on child care issues.* Parents would like additional online and face-to-face sources of child care information and child care networking possibilities. Focus groups revealed that some parents have had difficulty accessing child care information, especially new arrivals to a community and parents whose immigration status prevents them from seeking formal resources.
- *Parents are proactively exploring ways to address child care needs.* Focus group participants pointed to current and future planned activities for addressing their own child care needs, as well as those of the wider Coastside community. For example, parents reported grassroots efforts to form babysitting and child care cooperatives to address the lack of available spaces and the high costs of care. A few parents expressed interest in supporting lower income parents who cannot afford child care, through offering time or money.

Opportunities and Conclusions

The findings suggest that Coastside parents are by and large, satisfied with their current care arrangements. However, this study also reveals that for some types of care, and for some parent populations, more supports are, in fact, needed. The section below addresses some of the Coastside child care and development opportunities stemming from the findings, specifically for policy makers, support organizations, child care providers, schools, and parents.

- *For policy makers.* This study points to the need for further support for low income and Latino families, and families from South Coastside communities, whose needs are not being met. This study also points to opportunities for policy makers to consider how policies might better facilitate new, innovative child care initiatives, including sliding-fee and pay-as-you-go models where feasible, for some parent populations. Finally, the study indicates a need for

policy focused on flexible care models, and potentially even hybrid models that incorporate both formal and informal child care solutions and networks.

- *For support organizations.* Organizations supporting Coastside child care have the opportunity to facilitate or provide mechanisms for parents and other stakeholders to connect around child care to collaboratively solve problems. Additionally, supporting organizations can continue to serve as intermediaries between parent populations and policy makers, providing research, data and information gathered from parents about the Coastside's needs. Finally, supporting organizations have the opportunity to enhance their outreach to those who do not know how to find child care resources or are afraid to look.
- *For child care providers.* Overall, this study points to opportunities for providers in terms of reaching out to and servicing underserved or less satisfied parent populations. Additionally, providers might further explore opportunities to offer services that are somewhat overlooked on the Coastside, including flexible, drop in, or temporary care.
- *For schools and districts.* Schools and districts could serve as sources and channels for information sharing between parents about child care issues—either through facilitating meeting and discussion groups or advocating and spreading information about child care issues and needs. Furthermore, schools and districts could explore options for funding partnerships for child care services opportunities, as well as for combined advocacy efforts.
- *For parents.* This study has indicated that grassroots efforts and volunteer problem solving have the potential to help parents meet the full range of child care and development needs. For those parents who have not done so, it could be beneficial to access parent-initiated channels for networking around child care that have proven effective. Parents could also form new, community-based parent groups and explore ways to develop local cooperative child care solutions. Parents can proactively express their opinions to local child care support organizations and child care providers.

In conclusion, the study revealed opportunities for policy-makers, supporting organizations, child care providers, school districts and parents to improve support for Coastside child care, especially among underserved and dissatisfied populations. These opportunities include the development of flexible care services (such as early morning care), improved channels for information sharing among parents, and school-community partnerships for funding and advocacy around Coastside child care.

Informing Child Care on the San Mateo County Coastside: A Study of Parents' Child Care and Development Needs

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education

1. Introduction

The San Mateo County Coastside is an agriculturally rich north-south corridor stretching along the California Pacific coast and State Highway 1 for approximately fifty miles. The region is comprised of a strand of sparsely populated towns and rural communities, which are geologically separated from the rest of San Mateo County by the northern end of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Its population is ethnically diverse, with a Mid Coastside (Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada and Half Moon Bay) population of 23,147 reporting a 21 percent Latino population, and a South Coastside (La Honda, San Gregorio and Pescadero) population of 3,286 reporting a 33 percent Latino population (Worden, 2003).

Alongside the rest of San Mateo County, the Coastside is noted for its high cost of living, which necessitates dual-income families in need of child care (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2006). Public knowledge regarding child care and development needs specific to Coastside families is limited. However, data published by the Child Care Coordinating Council revealed that licensed spaces for working parents meet only a small portion of the need for care, in both the Mid and South Coastside regions (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). Additionally, more recent data published by the Child Care Partnership Council indicate that in Half Moon Bay, for example, 39 percent of subsidy-eligible children are currently underserved regarding child care; in Pescadero, the percentage of underserved is estimated to be even higher, at 48 percent (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2009).

In light of existing literature indicating shortfalls in meeting child care and development needs for Coastside families, the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) conducted a study to explore child care and development needs among Coastside parents in greater depth. The specific aim of the study has been to determine whether and how parents are currently meeting their child care needs, as well as their perceived successes and challenges with their current care arrangements. Data were gathered for the study through a survey with Spanish and English speaking parents, specifically in the Mid and South Coastside communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Half Moon Bay, Pescadero, La Honda, and San Gregorio. Subsequently, four focus groups were conducted with a subset of the survey participants, in several of the Mid and South Coastside communities. Working through multiple channels including local media, elementary schools, community centers, county organizations, online parent groups, and child care providers, this study seeks to contribute to the growth of public knowledge regarding Coastside child care, and to improved child care services and resources for Coastside families.

2. Background and Context: Child Care on the Coastside

There is limited knowledge regarding the child care needs of parents on the San Mateo County Coastside. That which does exist suggests limited access to child care on behalf of parents. According to data published in the 1999-2000 Child Care Needs Assessment for San Mateo County, San Mateo County's Mid and South Coastside regions indicated grave shortages of licensed child care spaces (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). In the Mid Coast, the population of children 0-13 years of age is estimated at 5,399, with 71 percent living within a family that consists of two working parents or a single working parent. Yet, the number of spaces in licensed family child care homes totaled 362, while the number of full-time spaces in licensed child care centers totaled 248, and the number of part-time spaces totaled 363 (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). For the South Coast, the population of children 0-13 years of age numbers 478, of whom approximately 69 percent live in a family with two working parents or a single working parent. The number of spaces in licensed child care homes totaled 38, while the number of full-time spaces in licensed child care centers totaled zero, and the number of part-time spaces totaled 103 (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000).¹ To provide the background and context necessary to understand the special conditions affecting child care availability and accessibility on the Coast, this section sets forth information regarding the types of licensed and unlicensed child care available, child care costs and subsidies, land use parameters specific to the Coastside region, and supporting organizations providing child care information and resources to Coastside families and businesses.

Formal, licensed child care in the state of California is regulated by the Community Care Licensing Division of the Department of Social Services, and includes two primary types of services: child care centers and family child care homes (San Mateo County Human Services Agency, 2009). A child care center is a commercial facility that provides non-medical care and supervision for infants, toddlers, preschoolers or school-aged children in a group setting for all or part of the day (San Mateo County Human Services Agency, 2009; Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). Centers generally offer fixed hours of operation, and some offer subsidized child care spaces (Owen, Hoepke & Cho, 2000). Family child care homes operate exclusively in the home of the licensed caregiver (San Mateo County Human Services Agency, 2009). Classified as "small" or "large" capacity, family child care homes can provide non-medical care and supervision for up to eight children of varying ages, or 14 children with an adult assistant (San Mateo County Human Services Agency, 2009). Unlicensed, informal private child care service providers, on the other hand, include nannies, friends, neighbors or older siblings of the child in need of care.

On par with the rest of San Mateo County, the cost of Coastside child care ranks second highest in the state, averaging \$1500-\$1900/month for two children (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2006). Research indicates that many working families of San Mateo County as a whole are avoiding expenses related to child care and preschool by creatively managing

¹ More recent estimates for child care supply and demand in San Mateo County have not disaggregated data specific to the Coastside. However, the most recent countywide assessment indicated that child care needs are far from being met throughout San Mateo County (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2006). In 2008, in San Mateo County as a whole, there were approximately 22,000 licensed child care spaces available, providing room for about 26 percent of the total population of children potentially needing care (Sustainable San Mateo County, 2009).

their work arrangements and schedules (Preschool for All, 2005). Further research has shown that access to preschool care varies greatly by socio-economic status in San Mateo County: children who are low income, English language learners, and who come from less educated families are much less likely to attend preschool (Harlick, 2008). An additional study revealed that middle-income families enroll their children in preschool at a much lower rate than low and high-income families (Children Now, 2007).

For eligible families whose income is at or below 75 percent of the state median income of \$61,476, and who meet additional criteria such as citizenship, child care subsidies are available through both state and federal channels (San Mateo County Human Services, 2009; SMCCCPC, 2006). In view of the high cost of living in San Mateo County, which renders essentially unrealistic the survival of families earning at or near the subsidy cut-off limit of \$46,107 (San Mateo County Human Services, 2009; San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2006), a county child care pilot project has been initiated. The Child Care Subsidy Pilot (AB1326) is tailored to meet the needs, conditions and priorities of families struggling with San Mateo County's high costs (San Mateo County Human Services, 2009). This pilot program would enable San Mateo County to increase the statewide income eligibility exit limit, create an extended family fee schedule and increase the reimbursement rate in the county.

Coordinated strategies for increasing parents' access to formal child care services in San Mateo County as a whole include new after-school programs, homework centers, a child care center associated with a housing development, and a program to increase the number of certified child care staff and retention rates for child care staff. Signed in 2003, the Child Care Subsidy Pilot had, by 2006, increased service by 8.5 percent, without any new money invested (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2006). However, as of January 2009, the county's centralized waiting list for child care subsidies numbered over 3,000 children (Sustainable San Mateo County, 2009). Moreover, subsidy distribution priorities for the county may neglect less-populous communities such as those on the Coastsides. Table 1, below, from the San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council (2009), indicates the number of Coastsides children eligible for subsidized child care, the percentage of children underserved, and the priority² for each of the communities included in this study.

Table 1. Number Eligible, Percent Underserved and Subsidy Priorities By Community

Community	# Children Eligible	% Underserved	Subsidy Priority
Montara	10	70	0
Moss Beach	70	57	0
El Granada	6	0	0
Half Moon Bay	190	39	3
Pescadero	50	48	0
San Gregorio	1	0	0
La Honda	n/a	n/a	n/a

As these priorities attest, the lower population levels for the Coastsides can result in lower priorities within the county, because relatively few subsidy eligible children inhabit those communities. For example, compared to Half Moon Bay, which has been classified as a low

² The priorities are ordered from 0-3, with 0 as not a priority, 1 as the highest priority, and 3 as the lowest.

priority, the higher priority eastern San Mateo County town of Redwood City has a comparable percentage of underserved children, but has 775 eligible children, in contrast with 190 for Half Moon Bay, as listed above (San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, 2009).

Child care expansion and development in San Mateo County is hindered by land use policy and permitting issues (Anderson, 2003). For the Coastside, these issues are compounded and complicated by the Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1977, which supersedes local control of land use policy (California Coastal Commission, 2004). In an effort to increase the supply of licensed child care throughout the county by ten percent over five years, the Strategic Plan by the San Mateo Child Care Partnership Council presented a range of short- and long-term best practices and recommendations for addressing significant barriers to child care development caused by county land use policy and permit issues (Anderson, 2003). Although it did not address the unique challenges posed by Coastside land use policy conditions under the Coastal Conservation Act, the Strategic Plan recommended revising and streamlining zoning ordinances and permitting processes in ways that would be beneficial to Coastside child care development.

Short-term recommendations in the Strategic Plan pertinent to the Coastside included rendering permit and license requirements more accessible to potential child care service providers and to city/county staff providing child care permit assistance, allowing permitted child care providers to operate in all varieties of zones, and eliminating permit requirements for large family care homes (Anderson, 2003). Over the longer term, strategic recommendations included offering developers incentives for the inclusion of child care, and integrating child care into general plans for land use, housing, transportation and circulation (Anderson, 2003). Presumably, further exploration of land use issues impacting child care development for the Coastside would yield important insights. However, a recent land use study for the county included no information on the Coastside, because the survey issued to Half Moon Bay (the Coastside's only incorporated city) was not returned (Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, 2007).

Implications stemming from low population density and special conditions for land use development raise significant challenges for Coastside child care. However, Coastside parents benefit from a wide variety of support organizations, both governmental and non-profit, providing resources and information, as well as child care professional development, research and advocacy. For instance, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency funded a shuttle from Half Moon Bay to PeninsulaWorks San Carlos, to better serve families in isolated areas of the Coastside (San Mateo County Human Services Agency, 2005). Other examples of local governmental and non profit organizations offering support for child care in San Mateo County include the Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County (4Cs), the San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and First 5 California (California Children and Families Commission).

3. Methodology

As noted above, while existing knowledge on Coastside child care needs reveals gaps between child care supply and demand, and highlights policy-level measures to address the gaps, there is also a dearth of knowledge specifically about parents' perceptions on child care and child development within the context of the Coastside's unique population and geographic makeup. In

an effort to add to existing knowledge, this study employed a survey and focus groups with Spanish and English speaking parents on the San Mateo County Coastsides. As detailed below, survey data were collected from 541 parents representing 792 children, and focus group data were collected from 23 parents, representing 38 children. The data were analyzed with the goal of assessing the child care perceptions and experiences of parents, while determining whether and how the various demographic and geographic populations included in the study might differ. It is important to note that this study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive assessment of parental perceptions and experiences, but rather to explore some of the ways a particular group of parents—specifically the survey and focus group participants—perceive, draw upon, and experience child care on the Coastsides.

3.1 Parent Survey

The primary data collection instrument was a paper and web-based parent survey targeting Spanish and English speaking parents of children ages 0-12, across all income and ethnic groups, in the communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Half Moon Bay, San Gregorio, La Honda and Pescadero.

The survey instrument was developed through a systematic process, beginning with a review of existing literature on Coastsides and San Mateo County child care needs, followed by ten telephone interviews with Coastsides child care providers (both public and private providers) and two telephone interviews with experts at local child care support organizations (Child Care Coordinating Council and Preschool for All). The purpose of the literature review and the interviews was to assess the state of current public knowledge and research on Coastsides child care, and to identify where substantial knowledge gaps and knowledge needs exist. Drawing on the insights gathered, a survey instrument was developed and tested on Coastsides parents and child care experts at local support organizations, before being finalized. Employing both closed- and open-ended questions, the survey instrument aimed to collect information on parent and family demographics (for example, income level, ethnicity, ages of children) and current and future planned child care arrangements, as well as preferences, experiences and perceptions regarding child care arrangements.

A flier announcing the survey was distributed in the Coastsides' *Half Moon Bay Review*, as well as in parks, churches, public libraries and other local community centers. Print and/or web-based versions of the survey instrument were distributed through the following channels, targeting parents of children ages 0-12:

- Elementary schools in Cabrillo Unified and La Honda-Pescadero Unified school districts
- Coastsides child care providers
- Community centers, including Moonridge Housing Community, Puente Community Resource Center, Coastsides Hope, and Half Moon Bay Parks and Recreation Center
- The community outreach group for healthcare issues, Coastsides Health Committee “Promotora” Group
- Half Moon Bay Public Library
- The San Mateo County Child Care Coordinating Council’s email list of Coastsides parents
- Parent-initiated online networks, including Coastsides Mothers’ Club and GreenMoms

- Local media, including Coastsider.com and Mid Coast Television

This process resulted in 541 parent participants across the seven communities. Table 2, below, provides a geographic breakdown of the survey participants.

Table 2. Geographic Breakdown of Survey Participants

Community of Residence	Percent (n)
Montara	9% (47)
Moss Beach	9% (50)
El Granada	18% (99)
Half Moon Bay	46% (245)
San Gregorio	1% (5)
La Honda	4% (20)
Pescadero	9% (51)
Did not respond	4% (24)
Total	100% (541)

As indicated in Table 2, the majority of participants reportedly reside in the Mid Coastside region, with 85 percent (441) from the communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, and Half Moon Bay, and 15 percent (76) from La Honda, San Gregorio and Pescadero.³ Nearly one-half of the parent participants provided child care information and perceptions about two of their children, their youngest and oldest. As such, the survey process resulted in data representing 792 children, ages 0-12.

A variety of statistical techniques were employed to analyze the survey data. First, basic descriptive statistics were determined for all survey items. T-tests and Anovas were conducted to determine differences between parent populations with regard to their perceptions, backgrounds and experiences. For example, differences were assessed between ethnic groups, in terms of how they responded to the survey items. Cross-tabulations were also conducted to determine whether variables were “contingent” upon another—for example, to assess whether child care choices were contingent upon parents’ ethnicity. Furthermore, correlational analyses were conducted to determine how two variables—for instance, whether a parent’s overall satisfaction with their current child care arrangement was related to their satisfaction with a specific aspect of formal care, such as cost—might relate to one another (in terms of both the strength and direction of the relationship between variables). Finally, responses to open-ended questions were analyzed to extract the most frequent themes in participants’ responses.

3.2 Parent Focus Groups

Informed by the preliminary analysis of the survey data, focus groups were designed to expand upon and elicit a more textured illustration of parents’ child care perceptions and experiences. Four focus groups were formed—one in Spanish and one English for both the Mid and South Coastside regions—employing sampling strategies to ensure representation of demographic

³ The participants’ geographic breakdown of 85/15 corresponds closely to 2002 U.S. census data, which reports a combined Mid and South Coastside population of 26,433, with the Mid Coastside region comprising 88 percent (23,147) and the South Coastside region comprising 12 percent (3,246).

profiles according to, for example, income level, household composition, and types of child care used.

Focus group participants were solicited through various channels. Initially, all survey participants were invited to indicate their interest in contributing to the focus groups. An invitation was also sent electronically in both Spanish and English through survey distribution channels, such as the Child Care Coordinating Council’s parent email list, Coastside Mothers’ Club email list, and elementary school parent email lists. Due to a low response rate from Spanish-speaking parents through these channels, Spanish-speaking parents were also recruited with help from local community organizations. Specifically, the Mid Coastside Spanish-speaking focus group was formed with help from the Coastside Health Committee Promotora group, and the South Coastside Spanish-speaking focus group was formed from parents enrolled in Puente Community Resource Center’s English as Second Language class in Pescadero.

The final sample resulted in 23 focus group participants, representing 38 children, in the Mid and South Coastside regions. A breakdown of focus group participants and their community of residence is provided in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Geographic Breakdown of Focus Group Participants

Coastside Region	Language	Parent Participants, <i>n</i>	Community of Residence
Mid Coastside	Spanish	8	Half Moon Bay
	English	3 ⁴	Montara, Half Moon Bay
South Coastside	Spanish	9	Pescadero
	English	3	La Honda
Total		23	

Each focus group, one hour in length, entailed a series of questions seeking to explore and expand upon survey findings. For example, preliminary analysis of the survey data revealed that the majority of parents relied on other parents and friends as resources for finding out about child care options. In exploring this topic, the focus groups discussed the specific ways in which parents connected to draw on one another as support for child care information. The focus group discussions were semi-structured, so that where relevant, themes emerging from one focus group were explored with parents in subsequent focus groups.

4. Findings

The findings that follow derive from the analysis of survey data provided by 541 parents, representing 792 Coastside children, ages 0-12.⁵ The findings also include analysis of data from the four focus groups with 23 parents representing 38 Coastside children. On the whole, the analysis revealed that parents are, on the whole, satisfied with their child care arrangements,

⁴ Although parent response to the English-speaking focus groups was initially high, fewer English speaking parents showed up to the focus groups than Spanish speaking parents. Because the aim of the focus groups was to add weight to and build upon the survey findings—rather than to serve as a means to collect definitive or representative data on child care needs—the English-speaking focus groups met their purpose, within the parameters of this study.

⁵ Because not all parents responded to all questions, the presentation of survey data may not always show the total 541 participants and their 792 children.

which frequently involved a mix of informal and formal types of care. However, the findings also indicate some dissatisfaction with child care arrangements and challenges in meeting child care needs, especially for specific parent populations. Within and outside these populations, parents were found to be proactively exploring ways to address Coastside child care needs, through parent-initiated networks and innovative child care solutions. Before offering a more detailed discussion of these findings around parents' child care perceptions and experiences, the section below provides an overview of survey participant demographics.

4.1 Parent Demographics

Analysis of survey data on parent demographics, which included information regarding ethnicity, income levels, work status, household makeup and children's ages, revealed that the survey participants were primarily of Caucasian or Latino ethnicity, representing a broad range of income levels and work statuses, as well as a variety of household compositions.

4.1.1 Ethnicity

As indicated in Table 4, below, 53 percent (287) of survey participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian and 39 percent (212) reported their ethnicity as Latino/Hispanic, while much smaller percentages of Asian, Pacific Islander and Native American ethnicities were also reported.

Table 4. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percent (n)
Caucasian	53% (287)
Latino/Hispanic	39% (212)
Asian	4% (20)
Pacific Islander	1% (3)
African American	0.4% (2)
Native American	0.2% (1)
Did not respond	3% (16)
Total	101%⁶ (541)

4.1.2 Income

A total of 37 percent (200) of survey participants reported a household income at \$100,000 or more. The remaining income groups were at lower percentages, as reflected in Table 5 below.⁷

⁶ All percentages for the demographic data were rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent, resulting in total percentages that may not equate to 100 percent.

⁷ The upper limit eligible to qualify for child care subsidy in San Mateo County is \$46,107 (San Mateo County Human Services, 2009; SMCCCPC, 2006). The combined percentages of participants who reported a household income of \$49,999 or less, which is near or falls within this limit, is 38 percent.

Table 5. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Household Income

Household Income (before taxes)	Percent (n)
Less than \$10,000	9% (47)
\$10,000-24,999	14% (76)
\$25,000-49,999	15% (80)
\$50,000-74,999	6% (34)
75,000-99,999	8% (44)
\$100,000 or more	37% (200)
Did not respond	11% (60)
Total	100% (541)

4.1.3 Work Status

Forty-five percent (242) of survey participants reported a work status of 40 hours or more of employment per week, while a 29 percent (158) reported working fewer than 40 hours per week. Sixteen percent (84) reported full-time parent status. Table 6, below, lists the total number of participants for each reported work status.

Table 6. Breakdown of Survey Participants By Work Status

Work Status	Percent (n)
Employed 40 or more hours per week	45% (242)
Employed fewer than 40 hours per week	29% (158)
Full-time parent	16% (84)
Unemployed (but seeking work)	5% (27)
Did not respond	6% (30)
Total	101% (541)

Survey participants also provided information regarding the work situation of a spouse or partner, as appropriate. As indicated in Table 7, a majority, at 60 percent (326), reported a spouse or partner working 40 hours or more per week.

Table 7. Breakdown of Spouse/Partner's Work Status

Work Status	Percent (n)
Employed 40 or more hours per week	60% (326)
Employed fewer than 40 hours per week	14% (76)
Full-time parent	5% (29)
Unemployed (but seeking work)	5% (26)
Not applicable	6% (33)
Did not respond	9% (51)
Total	99% (541)

4.1.4 Household Make-up

In response to survey questions soliciting information regarding household make-up, 15 percent (83) reported a household composed of a single parent or guardian, while 74 percent (400) reported a household composed of two parents or guardians. Only 8 percent (41) reported a household composed of extended family. Table 8 provides a synopsis of those figures.

Table 8. Breakdown of Survey Participants' Household Make-Up

Household Make-up	Percent (n)
One parent/guardian	15% (83)
Two parents/guardians	74% (400)
Extended family (Other relatives living at home)	8% (41)
Did not respond	3% (17)
Total	100% (541)

4.1.5 Children's Ages

Finally, for the total of 792 children represented by survey participants, respondents reported ages for all but 11 percent (84). Thirteen percent (100) were reported to be 1 year of age, which represented the largest single age grouping, followed by 10 percent (78) at age 5. The smallest single age grouping appeared with children aged 12, at 2 percent (19), followed by children aged 11, at 3 percent (23). Table 9, below, provides detailed information regarding the numbers and ages of children.

Table 9. Breakdown of Children's Ages

Age of Child	Percent (n)
Age 0	1% (10)
Age 1	13% (100)
Age 2	8% (64)
Age 3	7% (58)
Age 4	6% (51)
Age 5	10% (78)
Age 6	9% (70)
Age 7	9% (69)
Age 8	8% (66)
Age 9	6% (49)
Age 10	6% (51)
Age 11	3% (23)
Age 12	2% (19)
Did not respond	11% (84)
Total	100% (792)

4.2 Parent Experiences and Perceptions

4.2.1 Child Care Arrangements

Finding: Parents use a mix of types of care to meet their needs

Overall, parents draw on a combination of types of care for each of their children, including both formal care options and informal care options. Table 10, below, provides a detailed breakdown of the types of care used by parents in the survey. The most commonly reported type on the survey was parental care, at 32 percent (174), followed by infant and toddler and preschool care at 26 percent (145) and after elementary school care at 25 percent (128). Care by an older

sibling, at 4 percent (23) and family child care homes at 11 percent (60), were the least reported types of care used.

Table 10. Breakdown of Type of Care Used

Type of Care (Respondents select all that apply)	Percent (n) (Total N=549)
Parental care	32% (174)
Infant toddler/preschool	26% (145)
After elementary school	25% (138)
Non relative	21% (113)
Other relative	15% (85)
Family child care home	11% (60)
Older sibling	4% (23)

Comparing the combined percentages of informal types of care with formal types of care revealed that informal care (parental, relative, non relative, and older sibling care) is used for 72 percent (395) of the children, while formal care (infant and toddler/ preschool, after elementary school care, and family child care homes) is used for 28 percent (154) of children.

The focus groups revealed that, because one type of care often does not meet all child care needs, parents seek additional solutions. Parents who have their children in formal care providers, for example, reported that they seek help from neighbors, friends, and family to complement the number of hours offered by their providers. As explained by a Montara parent, in the Mid Coastside English-speaking focus group:

I can't guarantee that I'm going to be home by a certain time. [...] I've developed a strong network of neighbors who if I absolutely have to, I call them and they will get my kids [from my child care center].

Conversely, parents who care for their own children at home occasionally seek supplemental support through temporary or formal child care arrangements. For example, three parents in the South Coastside English-speaking focus groups indicated that they sometimes seek out other, temporary child care arrangements when they have emergencies, need to work unexpectedly long hours, or need to work outside of the home; or that they use formal care to complement their primarily full-time informal care arrangement to provide socialization opportunities for their children. Parents in the Pescadero Spanish-speaking focus group, all of whom reportedly care for their children themselves, indicated that they drew on center-based drop in care offered by Puente Community Resource Center when they have appointments or engagements.

Finding: Predominant type of care varies by parent populations

The analysis of survey data further revealed that the predominant type of care varies by ethnicity and income level of parents.

To begin with, the survey analysis revealed that 71 percent (98) of Caucasian children were in infant and toddler and preschool care, compared to 20 percent (28) of Latino children. Eighty-five percent (50) of Caucasian children were in family child care homes, compared to 3 percent

(2) of Latino children. The only type of care in which Latino children were reported more commonly was care by a non relative, at 53 percent (60) for Latino children and 41 percent (46) for Caucasian children. These findings are detailed in Table 11, below.

Table 11. Breakdown of Type of Care Used By Ethnicity⁸

Type of Care (Respondents select all that apply)	Ethnicity, Percent (n)	
	Caucasian	Latino
Infant and toddler/preschool	71% (98)	20% (28)
Family child care home	85% (50)	3% (2)
After elementary school	64% (88)	32% (44)
Parental care	70% (121)	23% (39)
Non relative	41% (46)	53% (60)
Older sibling	57% (13)	39% (9)
Other relative	64% (42)	31% (25)

Furthermore, as indicated in Table 12, below, while 65 percent (86) of high-income children were enrolled in infant and toddler care and preschool, only 11 percent (14) of medium-income children and 25 percent (33) of low-income children were enrolled in this type of care. Furthermore, while 65 percent (39) of high-income children were in family child care homes, only 23 percent (14) of medium income children and 12 percent (7) of low income children were in this type of care. Finally, 52 percent (83) of high-income children were in parental care, compared to 21 percent (34) and 26 percent (42) for medium and low-income children, respectively. Other types of care showed less variation across income levels, including after elementary school care, older sibling care, and other relative care.

Table 12. Breakdown of Type of Care Used By Income Level⁹

Type of Care (Respondents select all that apply)	Income Level, Percent (n)		
	Low	Medium	High
Infant and toddler/preschool	25% (33)	11% (14)	65% (86)
After elementary school	38% (45)	23% (28)	39% (47)
Family child care home	12% (7)	23% (14)	65% (39)
Parental care	26% (42)	21% (34)	52% (83)
Non relative	51% (55)	8% (9)	41% (44)
Older sibling	38% (8)	24% (5)	38% (8)
Other relative	35% (28)	26% (21)	39% (31)

Finding: Overall, parents are likely to use formal care in the future; however, likelihood varies by type of formal care and parent populations

As indicated in Table 13, the majority of survey participants reported they are very likely or likely to use infant and toddler care, preschool, or after elementary school care as their children grow older. However, the likelihood varies by type of care: 74 percent (220) of participants

⁸ Due to small numbers of respondents from other ethnicities, the analysis focused on Caucasian and Latino parents only. See Table 4 in this report for a breakdown of survey participants by ethnicity.

⁹ The income level analysis was based upon a household income categorization from the U.S. Census Bureau, used by the Sustainability Hub project of San Mateo County (www.sustainabilityhub.net), which classifies low as up to \$49,999 per year, medium as \$50,000-99,999 and high as >\$100,000 per year.

reported they are very likely and 16 percent (47) reported that they are likely to use preschool care, while only 48 percent (110) reported they are very likely and 19 percent (43) reported they are likely to use infant and toddler care. Additionally, 49 percent (286) of participants reported that they are very likely and 24 percent (137) of participants reported they are likely to use after elementary school care in the future.

Table 13. Likelihood of Using Formal Care By Type of Care

Level of Likelihood	Type of Care, Percent (n)		
	Infant and toddler	Preschool	After elementary school
Very likely	48% (110)	74% (220)	49% (286)
Likely	19% (43)	16% (47)	24% (137)
Unlikely	10% (22)	3% (9)	14% (79)
Very unlikely	24% (56)	8% (23)	14% (79)
Total	100% (231)	100% (220)	100% (581)

Further analyses revealed variations in parent’s likelihood to use formal care by parent ethnicity. Table 14 below shows that a greater percentage of Latino parents are either very likely or likely to use all types of formal care choices than Caucasian parents. The greatest distinction between the two ethnic groups was found for infant and toddler care: 86 percent (86) of Latino parents reported that they are very likely or likely use infant and toddler care in the future compared to 48 percent (54) of Caucasian parents.

Table 14. Percent Very Likely or Likely to Use Formal Care By Ethnicity and Type of Care

Type of Care	Very Likely or Likely By Ethnicity, Percent (n)	
	Caucasian	Latino
Infant and toddler	48% (54)	86% (86)
Preschool	87% (138)	92% (103)
After elementary school	64% (232)	91% (163)

As revealed in Table 15 below, the analysis revealed that a greater percentage of low-income parents reported that they are likely or very likely to use all types of care than medium and high-income level parents. This was especially true for infant and toddler care and after elementary school care. Eighty-nine percent (88) of low-income participants reported they are very likely or likely to use infant and toddler care, compared to 50 percent (12) for medium and 50 percent (46) for high-income parents. For after elementary school care, 90 percent (165) of low income parents reported they are very likely or likely to use this type of care, compared to 64 percent (62) for middle-income and 62 percent (159) for high-income parents.

Table 15. Percent Very Likely or Likely to Use Formal Care By Income Level and Type of Care

Type of Care	Very Likely or Likely By Income Level, Percent (<i>n</i>)		
	Low	Medium	High
Infant and toddler	89% (88)	50% (12)	50% (46)
Preschool	93% (103)	84% (32)	89% (116)
After elementary school	90% (165)	64% (62)	62% (159)

Finding: *Cost, convenience, and perceptions about children’s welfare and development reported as factors influencing child care choices*

Analysis of open-ended survey responses revealed that across all types of care, the most common factors reported to influence child care choices were cost and convenience. In terms of cost, parents reported that they chose their formal care provider because it was affordable. For example, one parent stated that her provider was “a good value for the money” and another explained that “the price is great.” Other parents who draw on informal care reported that, for example, “it is my only option, as I cannot afford to put my baby in a center,” or that “we are fortunate to have family members care for our child because it saves us a lot of money.” In terms of convenience, parents using both formal and informal types of care reported that they chose their current child care providers because they are close to home, or on site at their child’s school.

For informal types of care, other factors beyond cost and convenience cited by parents include beliefs that children are better off when raised by family or other trustworthy individuals, followed by perceptions that informal care provides a more caring environment for children. Parents indicated, for example, “we feel it’s best for the children to be cared for by family and close friends,” “we believe in being very involved parents,” and “I provide the best and most loving care for my child.”

In terms of formal care, parents using infant and toddler care and preschool additionally cited opportunities for child socialization and preparation for kindergarten as positive factors. For example, parents indicated the importance of allowing their child “to interact with other children her age, and to have her get a head start on learning atmosphere for kindergarten.” For parents using after elementary school care, homework assistance emerged as a key reason beyond cost and convenience for choosing this type of care. Finally, in the case of family child care homes, a home-like environment and the quality of care were cited as additional factors alongside cost and convenience.

Finding: *Full tuition payments the most common fee arrangement for formal child care*

As indicated in Table 16, below, full tuition payments were reportedly used for 80 percent (268) of children. Other fee arrangements, including government assistance, sliding scale and fee assistance from employer, were reportedly used less. Eight percent (25) utilize some “other” fee/tuition arrangement, including fee waivers and trades with other parents.

Table 16. Fee/Tuition Arrangement for Formal Child Care

Type of Fee Arrangement	Percent (n)
Pay full tuition	80% (268)
Government assistance/subsidy	6% (19)
Sliding scale or reduced rate from provider	4% (13)
Fee assistance from employer	2% (7)
Scholarship	2% (5)
Other	8% (25)
Total	102% (334)

4.2.2 Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement

Finding: Overall, parents satisfied with their current child care arrangement

As shown below in Table 17, the majority of survey participants reported that they are very satisfied or satisfied with their current child care arrangement. Specifically, 57 percent (413) reported they are very satisfied, and an additional 30 percent (220) reported they are satisfied with their current child care arrangement.

Table 17. Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement

Level of Satisfaction	Percent (n)
Very satisfied	57% (413)
Satisfied	30% (220)
Neutral	9% (65)
Dissatisfied	2% (12)
Very dissatisfied	2% (16)
Total	100% (726)

Finding: Satisfaction with child care arrangement is less for some parent populations

When considering levels of parental satisfaction with current arrangement by type of care used, the analysis revealed differences. As shown below in Table 18, the combined percentage of those satisfied and very satisfied was highest for infant and toddler/preschool and parental care, which were both at 92 percent. The percentages of those very satisfied or satisfied were lowest for care by an older sibling and by a non relative, which were at 73 percent (16) and 74 percent (81), respectively.

Table 18. Percent Satisfied or Very Satisfied By Type of Care

Type of Care	Total N	Very Satisfied or Satisfied, Percent (n)
Infant and toddler/preschool	144	92% (133)
Parental care	161	92% (148)
After elementary school	128	90% (115)
Other relative	84	89% (75)
Family child care home	59	86% (51)
Non relative	109	74% (81)
Older sibling	22	73% (16)

Beyond the lower overall satisfaction with their current child care arrangement reported by those using non relative and older sibling care, the analysis of survey data further revealed lower levels of satisfaction for two specific parent populations: Low-income parents and South Coastside parents. Firstly, when comparing level of satisfaction by income level, the analysis revealed that low-income parents expressed the least overall satisfaction with their child care arrangement on the survey.¹⁰ Further analysis of open-ended survey responses by low-income parents who were dissatisfied with their child care arrangement revealed that their primary reasons for choosing their current arrangement were low cost and lack of other options. Additionally, the analysis revealed that low-income parents wanted to change to an arrangement that better promotes learning and fosters development skills, that is safer than their current arrangement, and that is more affordable.

Additionally, parents in the Pescadero, La Honda, and San Gregorio area reported less overall satisfaction with current child care arrangements than parents in the Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada and Half Moon Bay area.¹¹ Analysis of dissatisfied, South Coastside participants' answers to open-ended survey questions indicated frustration with a lack of available child care options in their area. Similarly, focus groups with parents in the Pescadero, La Honda and San Gregorio area reported an insufficient number of formal care providers, as well as a concomitant scarcity of parents in the area who could support each other. As one La Honda parent in the English-speaking focus group expressed:

I really think that we need an in-home provider [family child care home] in La Honda. Even trying to get a babysitter is almost impossible.

Two Pescadero parents in the Spanish-speaking focus group further expressed:

There aren't certified, qualified, safe people around this area who can care for our children and with whom we feel safe.

Apart from Puente and the schools, there aren't any other services here in Pescadero. [...] We need services [...] especially during the period between age 0 and when kids start school.

In sum, both Spanish and English speaking parents in the South Coastside communities revealed dissatisfaction with their current child care arrangements, stemming from perceived lack of child care options and services.

Finding: Overall, most want to keep their current arrangement, except for those using certain types of informal care

As shown below in Table 19, for 64 percent (456) of their children, parents did not want to change to another type of arrangement; an interest in changing to another arrangement was

¹⁰ Anova analysis results were: (F (2, 658) = 9.20, p = .000)

¹¹ Anova analysis results were: (F (2, 692) = 3.94, p = .020)

reported for only 19 percent (134), while uncertainty about whether they would like to make a change was reported for the remaining 17 percent (119).

Table 19. Desire to Change to Another Child Care Arrangement

Desire to Change	Percent (n)
Do not want to change	64% (456)
Want to change	19% (134)
Not certain	17% (119)
Total	100% (709)

Additional analyses to assess the factors that play a role in parents’ desire to change to another type of child care revealed that demographics (for example, ethnicity, income level, household make up) did not play a role. However, when the data were examined according to types of care, the percentage of those wanting to change was higher specifically for care by an older sibling, which was at 32 percent (7) and for care by a non relative, which was at 36 percent (39). Table 20, below, provides a breakdown of the percentage of those wanting to change according to type of care.

Table 20. Percentage Who Want to Change By Type of Care

Type of Care	Total N	Want to Change, Percent (n)
Non relative	108	36% (39)
Older sibling	22	32% (7)
Other relative	82	20% (16)
Family child care home	60	17% (10)
Infant and toddler/preschool	144	14% (20)
Parental care	164	12% (19)
After elementary school	126	10% (12)

Finding: *For those parents who do want to make a change, lower cost, closer location, and enhanced child development opportunities were prominent reasons*

For children in informal care, the primary reason for wanting to change to another type of care, as cited on the survey (open-ended responses) and in focus groups, was a desire for enhanced opportunities for their children’s development, either academically, socially, or culturally through arts enrichment activities at formal care providers. For children in formal care (both center-based and in-home provider care), a convenient, closer location, and a lower cost surfaced as prominent reasons for wanting to change to another arrangement.

Factors preventing parents from changing to another child care arrangement included cost, location, and availability of child care spaces. For all types of child care, cost, location, and lack of available spaces in a preferred child care option were cited on the survey (open-ended responses) as common reasons for not making a change.

Finding: *Scheduling and affordability reported as the most common child care challenges*

Table 21, below, lists child care challenges reported by parents on the survey. As indicated, the most common child care challenge reported on the survey was finding care to match work schedules (42 percent), followed by finding affordable care (41 percent).

Table 21. Child Care Challenges Experienced During the Past Year

Challenges (Respondents select all that apply)	Percent (n) (Total N = 344)
Finding care to match my work schedule	42% (144)
Finding affordable care	41% (141)
Finding high quality care	27% (94)
Finding temporary care	24% (82)
Transportation to and from child care	23% (80)
Finding a space in preferred provider	23% (78)
Finding dependable care	23% (78)
Finding care for my child with special needs	6% (20)
Other	5% (16)

The focus groups supported these findings. For example, in terms of finding care to match work schedules, a Montara parent in the Mid Coastside, English-speaking focus group noted:

Last year when the slide went out, I was working in the Harbor and came from Montara and it was taking me 1hr 30 minutes to travel 7 miles. Those things happen to us out here that are unique to the Coastside. When I say that flexibility is the biggest thing/issue, a lot of centers' hours didn't start until 7 or 8, and if you have to be at a job in San Francisco by 8 you can't get there in time. So especially if your job doesn't offer you that flexibility it can be really difficult.

Another parent, a foster parent in the Mid Coastside English-speaking focus group, likewise reported flexible care as a key challenge, citing the need to have care on "short notice" as imperative to her situation. Additionally, all parents in the South Coastside English-speaking focus group indicated that finding flexible care was a central child care challenge, and was a primary impetus to their interest in participating in the focus groups. Specifically, temporary, drop-in care was reported as a necessity for these parents, who either work from home or work part time, and need care for emergency situations or unexpected schedule changes.

For parents in the Spanish-speaking focus groups, finding care to match work schedules was raised less prominently as a key challenge; rather, these participants cited cost and affordability as their central child care challenges. Specifically, one Pescadero parent in the South Coastside Spanish-speaking focus group indicated:

There are places that charge ten or fifteen dollars per hour per child, and we can't afford it. It's expensive. If you qualify, they pay for all of it, but if you don't, it's very difficult.

Several other parents in the South Coastside Spanish-speaking focus group echoed this sentiment about the high cost of care, including the following:

I was working, but stopped because it was better to watch my kids myself instead of paying for childcare. It costs more money to work and have my kids taken care of compared to not working and watching my kids myself.

4.2.3 Satisfaction With and Importance of Specific Aspects of Formal Care

Finding: Overall, parents employing formal care indicated satisfaction with all aspects

The survey revealed parental satisfaction with all aspects of formal child care. Table 22, below, provides the means showing their level of satisfaction (where 1 is very dissatisfied, and 5 is very satisfied). As indicated, parents were most highly satisfied with the location of the child care facility (\underline{M} =4.52), languages spoken by staff (\underline{M} =4.50), staff experience (\underline{M} =4.43), and staff-parent communication (\underline{M} =4.39). Comparatively, parents were less satisfied with the cost of formal child care (\underline{M} =4.05).

Table 22. Satisfaction With Specific Aspects of Child Care

Aspect of Care	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cost	387	4.05	1.02
Hours of operation	376	4.38	.87
Location of facility	383	4.52	.80
Staff experience	378	4.43	.75
Communication between staff and parents	378	4.39	.78
Languages spoken by staff	384	4.50	.71
Number of student per staff member	376	4.37	.78
Curriculum/types of activities offered	374	4.22	.91

To determine whether satisfaction with specific aspects of formal child care might be related to parents' satisfaction with their overall child care arrangement, additional analyses were conducted. Specifically, the analyses revealed the strongest correlation between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with a) communication between parents and staff and b) staff experience. This translates as follows: when parents were highly satisfied with staff experience and staff-parent communication, they were also highly satisfied with their current child care arrangement.¹²

Finding: All aspects of child care reported as important; however, level of importance varies for some parent populations

Overall, parents employing formal care indicated all aspects are important (where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important). Table 23, below, shows that the most important aspects of formal care, as reported by parents on the survey, include communication between staff and parents (\underline{M} =4.81), activities promoting social skills (\underline{M} =4.66), outdoor/nature based activities

¹² Correlational analysis results were $r = 0.43^{**}$, $p = .000$, for both staff-parent communication and staff experience.

(\underline{M} =4.56) and hours of operation (\underline{M} =4.55). Also revealed in Table 23 is that less important aspects of formal care include full-time care (\underline{M} =3.91) and a facility connected to a school (\underline{M} =3.92).

Table 23. Importance Attributed By Parents To Various Aspects of Child Care

Aspect of Importance	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cost	565	4.47	.83
Hours of operation	551	4.55	.81
Full-time care	549	3.91	1.39
State-licensed facility	538	4.52	.85
Facility connected to school	537	3.92	1.29
Facility close to home/office	534	4.33	.95
Importance of board or state certified staff	539	4.44	.86
Communication between staff and parents	557	4.81	.53
Staff being fluent in child's first language	549	4.41	.94
Number of children per staff member	548	4.57	.76
Assistance with homework	571	4.21	1.09
Activities promoting academic development	564	4.47	.86
Activities promoting social skills	561	4.66	.65
Outdoor/nature-based activities	562	4.56	.69
Sport-related activities	554	4.24	.91
Arts and enrichment activities	556	4.46	.78

Additional analyses revealed that the importance placed on specific aspects of child care varies by ethnicity. Whereas student-teacher ratio was a more important aspect of formal care for Caucasian parents than for Latino parents, cost, full-time scheduling, a facility connected to schools, homework assistance, academic development and sports activities were reported as more important by Latino parents.¹³

Finding: Preferred site for preschool is facility connected to school, especially for Latino parents

In looking at the location of facility, analyses were conducted to assess parental preferences specifically about the location of a preschool. As indicated in Table 24, below, 50 percent (132) of parents who have a child in preschool, or who expect to place their child in preschool, reportedly prefer a facility that is connected to an elementary school. Thirty-five percent (93) indicated that they prefer an independent preschool, and 3 percent (8) prefer a preschool connected to a church. Eleven percent (30) of survey participants reportedly prefer a preschool located at an “other” site. Items listed for the “other” category by survey participants included

¹³ T-test results showing that student-teacher ratio was a more important aspect of formal care for Caucasian parents were: (t (501) = 2.69, p <.05). T-test results showing that specific aspects formal care were more important to Latino parents include: Cost (t (518) = -3.93, p <.001), full time scheduling (t (501) = -9.78, p <.001), a facility connected to school (t (490) = -8.10, p , 001), homework assistance (t (518) = -6.94, p ,.001), academic development (t (511) = -4.68, p <.001) and sports activities (t (504)= -7.04, p <.001).

that they were not certain about their preferred site, or that they preferred other sites such as those for parent cooperatives or for group home schools.

Table 24. Preferred Site for Preschool

Preferred site	Percent (n)
Preschool connected to elementary school	50% (132)
Independent preschool	35% (93)
Preschool connected to a church	3% (8)
Other	11% (30)
Total	100% (263)

The analysis also revealed that the preferred site for preschools varies by parent populations. Specifically, 78 percent (82) of Latino parents reportedly prefer a preschool connected to an elementary school, compared to only 31 percent (41) of Caucasian parents. On the other hand, 51 percent (67) of Caucasian parents reportedly prefer an independent preschool compared to 11 percent (12) of Latino parents. Table 25, below, provides a breakdown of preferred site by ethnicity.

Table 25. Breakdown of Preferred Site for Preschool By Ethnicity¹⁴

Type of Care	Ethnicity, Percent (n)	
	Caucasian	Latino
Preschool connected to elementary school	31% (41)	78% (82)
Independent preschool	51% (67)	11% (12)
Preschool connected to a church	3% (4)	3% (3)
Other	15% (20)	8% (8)
Total	100% (132)	100% (105)

4.2.4 Child Care Information and Resources

Finding: *Friends and other parents primary information sources for child care options*

As shown below in Table 26, parents reported that they most commonly found out about their current child care provider through a friend (58 percent). Other sources of information about child care providers included: a local parent group (12 percent), community center (11 percent) and the Internet (5 percent). Twenty-one percent (79) of parents reported that they found out about their child care providers through “other” means; analysis of open-ended responses on the “other” category revealed that the most prevalent means was through their child’s school.

¹⁴ Because other ethnicities had very low frequencies on the survey, the analysis focused on the two main ethnicity groups, Caucasian and Latino.

Table 26. Source of Information About Child Care Provider

Information Source (Respondents select all that apply)	Percent (n) (Total N = 370)
Friend, acquaintance or family member	58% (215)
Local parent group	12% (46)
Community center	11% (41)
Internet search	5% (20)
Other	21% (79)

Focus groups revealed that parents in both the Mid and South Coastside English-speaking focus groups sought child care information—both in terms of provider information and child care supports—from other parents through parent-initiated online discussion groups (such as Coastside Mothers’ Club and GreenMoms), in addition to local meeting places, such as playgrounds. In the South Coastside community of La Honda, community bulletin boards were said to provide information for parents in this sparsely populated rural area, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

I see the post office as the bulletin board – that’s kind of our community central [...] they have a big bulletin board [...]. So that’s a hub....that would be a place, a resource, to advertise [for child care services].

Parents in the Mid and South Coastside Spanish-speaking focus groups reported that they obtained information about child care services and supports from fellow parents, from community centers (such as Puente Community Resource Center in Pescadero), and from school news bulletins.

Finding: *Parents want additional ways to find out about child care and connect with other parents*

The focus groups revealed that parents would like additional online and face-to-face sources of child care information and child care networking possibilities. Specifically, parents in both the Mid and South Coastside focus groups reported some difficulties in accessing child care information. As noted by a Montara focus group participant:

One of the hard things on the Coastside is getting the word out and getting it out to the right people, especially if it’s before the school age. Once you plug into the school system, I get stuff home all the time as part of their school packet. There are resources and things. Prior to that, how do you even hear about it. Typically for me, it’s been word-of-mouth.

In addressing this need for lack of sufficient ways to access child care information, the focus group participant suggests face-to-face meetings between parents to meet and discuss child care issues, as illustrated below:

There’s not a whole lot of opportunity to get together and know the parents, like to have potlucks once a quarter, for example. There’s no formalized get-

together to discuss issues and have the chance to try to make them better (31.27). For me that would be the easiest forum.

Additional concerns around accessing child care information were also expressed by focus group participants, specifically with regards to parents who are new arrivals to a community, and who have undocumented immigrant status. In terms of the former, a La Honda focus group participant noted that as a new resident in La Honda, she had difficulties meeting other parents with babies. As a result, she reached out to Half Moon Bay, where she is now a part of a playgroup. Other parents indicated that undocumented immigrant status can prevent some parents' ability to access information and other resources around child care.

Finding: Parents proactively explore ways to address child care needs

Focus group participants pointed to parents' current and future planned activities for addressing their own child care needs, as well as those of the wider Coastside community. Parents reported grassroots efforts to form babysitting and child care cooperatives to address the lack of available spaces and the high costs of child care. The general sentiment around grassroots efforts within the focus groups is illustrated by a quote from a La Honda focus group participant, below:

The power is definitely in our own creativity and coming together. Like this playgroup has come out of an organic real need, and because we don't have the base to support bigger structures or support services it has to come from us...the strength really does come from the parents and the greater community and I think that's not going to change.

An additional focus group participant from La Honda provided an example of a solution to the lack of adequate child care spaces, in the form of a cooperative:

If there was a group that could go out and teach people who might be interested in starting their own daycare...how to do it, how to get certified, how to think about it. Almost like a social worker, who would first go to the community and say, "There's obviously some childcare/preschool missing in your community. We would love to show you how to build something like within your community. How many of you would like to participate if we were to help you do that."

All three parents in the Mid Coastside, English-speaking focus groups echoed the community sentiment, specifically indicating an interest in supporting parent populations who do not have access to child care. One parent noted that she would consider helping lower income parents who cannot afford child care, through, for example, donations. Finally, parents in the Pescadero, Spanish-speaking focus group likewise reported the necessity of parents helping each other out within her community. One parent provided an example of how she might pick up a friend's child from child care in the case of an emergency, like sickness or an unexpected scheduling conflict.

5. Opportunities

The findings suggest that Coastside parents are by and large, satisfied with their current care arrangements. However, this study also reveals that for some types of care, and for some parent populations, more supports are, in fact, needed. The section below addresses some of the Coastside child care and development opportunities stemming from the findings, specifically for policy makers, support organizations, child care providers, schools and parents.

5.1 Policy Makers

This study points to the need for further support for low income and Latino families, and families from the San Gregorio, Pescadero, La Honda areas, whose present dissatisfaction with their child care arrangements, or desire to change to other arrangements, suggests that their needs are not being met by current child care programs and policies. In light of the findings that middle and low-income families to a small degree draw on formal care, and that cost was one of the biggest obstacles to accessing alternative care arrangements, this study also points to opportunities for policy makers to consider how policies might better facilitate new, innovative child care initiatives where feasible, including sliding-fee and pay-as-you-go models for non-subsidy parent populations. Finally, the study indicates a need for policy focused on flexible care models (such as early morning care), and potentially even hybrid models that incorporate both formal and informal child care solutions and networks to ensure that subsidized child care programs are meeting the needs of all Coastside parents.

5.2 Support Organizations

Organizations supporting Coastside child care have the opportunity to facilitate connections around child care by providing mechanisms—both online and offline—for parents and other stakeholders to collaboratively solve community-wide child care problems and meet individual child care or development needs. Optimally, support organizations can continue to serve as intermediaries between parent populations and policy makers, by providing research, data and information gathered from parents about the Coastside's unique child care needs, and by using this research to make the case to local- and state-level policy makers for more innovative child care solutions. Organizations could also attempt to share information about their members as a way to create a stronger case for child care needs to policy makers. Furthermore, organizations with strong membership bases are uniquely positioned to develop linkages between California communities that are similar in terms of parental make up and needs. Finally, supporting organizations have the opportunity to enhance their outreach around Coastside child care services to those who do not know how to find child care resources, or who hesitate to look due to, for example, undocumented immigrant status. Organizations could enhance their outreach by continuing to provide training to existing child care providers to improve the quality and variety of child care services offered in Coastside communities. As Coastside parents have expressed a desire to develop grassroots child care solutions, these intermediary organizations can provide training and information about child care certification to parents, as well as information about how to create and sustain effective, high-quality child care networks in their own communities.

5.3 Child Care Providers

Overall, this study points to opportunities for providers in terms of reaching out to and servicing underserved or less satisfied parent populations, including parents using non-relative or older sibling care, and low-income parents. Additionally, providers might further explore opportunities to offer services that are somewhat overlooked on the Coastside, including flexible, drop in, or temporary care. The study also points to specific areas for providers to address in their marketing and outreach to new parents, including socialization opportunities and homework assistance, which were reported as key factors influencing parents' choice of formal care. Finally, in light of the findings indicating that different parent populations placed importance upon and were satisfied with different aspects of child care, providers may target and refine their outreach and supports to address these varied needs. In sum, Coastside child care providers can better meet the needs of Coastside parents by modifying and enhancing their services, payment structures, and by developing targeted communications designed to reach all parent populations.

5.4 Schools and Districts

Schools and districts could serve as sources and channels for information sharing between parents about child care issues and needs—either through facilitating meeting and discussion groups or advocating and spreading information about child care issues and needs in school newsletters and other channels. Furthermore, schools and districts could explore options for funding partnerships for child care and child care opportunities, as well as for combined advocacy efforts toward enhanced child care services and opportunities. For example, school districts could play a role in advocating for preschools connected to schools, for after-school child care programs that provide homework assistance, or could explore merging school-based services with child care provider-based services to cut costs and avoid duplicative programming.

5.5 Parents

This study has indicated that grassroots efforts and volunteer problem solving have the potential to help parents meet the full range of parental child care and development needs (for example “trading” with other parents on child care to attain flexible care, and parent-initiated playgroups for socialization opportunities). For those parents who have not done so, might benefit from accessing parent-initiated channels for networking around child care. Those that have proven effective, include community bulletin boards, playgrounds, online discussion groups and babysitting cooperatives, such as Coastside Mothers' Club and GreenMoms. Parents might also form new, community-based parent groups and explore, for example, ways to develop local cooperative child care solutions; they might also form groups to discuss child care needs on the Coastside, both as a way toward solutions, and also as a means to achieve strength through numbers for voicing their concerns. Regarding the latter, parents may proactively express their opinions to local child care support organizations and child care providers—for example, by stressing the need for non traditional hours of operation, and for innovative ways to reduce child care costs.

6. Conclusions

This study has indicated that meeting Coastside child care and development needs requires collaborative efforts among policy makers, parents, organizations, schools and providers. These collaborative efforts can take multiple forms, from school-community partnerships for funding and advocacy, to grassroots parent networks, to research and policy partnerships. Furthermore, in light of the findings that dissatisfaction with existing Coastside child care options and arrangements lies with specific parent populations, this study underscores a need for additional research to more fully understand the factors influencing their dissatisfaction, as a way to support the development of responsive services for these parents. Finally, because parental needs change during the course of their children's growth, it is necessary to continue to explore parental perceptions and experiences, including grassroots and informal solutions that work for parents, and to assess ways to develop and leverage these alongside formal child care solutions.

References

- Anderson, K.M. (2003). *Supporting Child Care Development in San Mateo County: Best Practices and Recommendations*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://www.sanmateo4cs.org/images/pdfs/supportingccreport.pdf>
- California Coastal Commission (2004). *Enforcement Program Annual Report*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://www.coastal.ca.gov/enforcement/enforcement_program.pdf
- Children Now (2007). *California County Data Book, San Mateo County*. Retrieved May 4, 2009, from http://publications.childrennow.org/publications/invest/cdb07/cdb07_sanmateo.htm
- Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County (2007). *Child Care Land Use Study*. Retrieved June 20, 2009, from http://www.sanmateo4cs.org/images/pdfs/child_care_land_use_study.pdf
- Harlick, D. (2008). *Children Ages 0-5 in San Mateo County: A Review of Research, Community Data, and Grantee Results, First Five: San Mateo County*. Retrieved June 20, 2009, from http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/Attachments/first5/PDFs/SubFolder/Final_Needs_Assess-Eval_Report.pdf
- Owen, S.M., Hoepke, K. and Cho, V. (2000). *San Mateo County Childcare Partnership Council Needs Assessment*. Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo. Retrieved June 9, 2009, from <http://plsinfo.org/healthysmc/pdf/childneeds.pdf>
- Preschool for All (2005). *San Mateo County Supply and Demand Study Final Report*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from [http://www.sanmateo4cs.org/images/pdfs/supply%20and demand final report.pdf](http://www.sanmateo4cs.org/images/pdfs/supply%20and%20demand%20final%20report.pdf)
- San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council (2006). *Highlights of the Child Care Needs Assessment, San Mateo County, 2006*. San Mateo County Office of Education. Retrieved May 15, 2009, from http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/apps/pub.asp?Q=194&B=CCPC_Highlights_of_NA.pptfromwww.smcoe.k12.ca.us.CCPC
- San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education (2009). *San Mateo County Subsidized Child Care and State Preschool Priorities 2008/2009*. Retrieved June 16, 2009, from http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/projects/19/Child_Care_Partnership_Council/CCPC_New_Documents/CCPC_Subsidy_Priorities_08_09.pdf
- San Mateo County Human Services Agency (2005). *Strategic Directions for San Mateo County Human Services, Progress Update 2005*. Retrieved May 1, 2009, from http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/hsa.dir/aboutus_pubs/initiatives_final_for_web_post_1-5-05.pdf

San Mateo County Human Services Agency (2009). *Subsidized Child Care*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/smc/departments/hsa/home/0,2151,15587572_397248377,00.html

Sustainable San Mateo County (2009). *Indicators for a Sustainable San Mateo County*. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://www.sustainablesanmateo.org/indicators-report/reports/2009-indicators-report>

Worden, D. (2003). *San Mateo County Mid Coastside Communities*. Half Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved June 14, 2009, from http://www.halfmoonbaychamber.org/pdf/demographics_midcoast_2003.pdf

Worden, D. (2003). *San Mateo County South Coastside Communities*. Half Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved June 14, 2009, from http://www.halfmoonbaychamber.org/pdf/demographics_SouthCoast_2003.pdf

Acknowledgements

The findings and conclusions presented in the report are those of the authors alone. We would like to thank the following organizations for their contributions to the success of this study and acknowledge that the report does not necessarily reflect their opinions.

- [Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County](#)
- [Coastside Child Development Center](#) (formerly Coastside Infant/Toddler Center)
- [Coastside Children's Programs](#)
- Coastside Health Committee Promotora Group
- [Coastside Hope](#)
- [Coastside Mothers' Club](#)
- [Coastsider.com](#)
- Coastside Parents Action League for Special Needs Children and Adults
- [El Granada Elementary School](#)
- El Granada Licensed Family Child Care Home (Cecilia Bertao's)
- [Farallone View Elementary School](#)
- [GreenMoms Coastside](#)
- [Half Moon Bay Library](#)
- [Half Moon Bay Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Hatch Elementary School](#)
- [Kings Mountain Elementary School](#)
- [La Honda Elementary School](#)
- La Honda Elementary School Online Discussion Group
- La Honda-Pescadero Schools Online Discussion Group
- Montessori Children's World
- [Moonridge Child Development Center](#)
- [Our Lady of the Pillar Church](#)
- [Pescadero Elementary School](#)
- Picasso Preschool
- [Pillar Ridge Manufactured Home Community](#)
- [Preschool for All San Mateo County](#)
- [Puente de la Costa Sur](#) (Puente Community Resource Center)
- [San Gregorio General Store](#)
- [San Mateo County Human Services Agency](#)
- [San Mateo County Office of Education](#)
- [Seacrest Daycare](#)
- South Coast San Mateo County Online Discussion Group
- South Skyline Online Discussion Group
- [Upgrade Children's Center](#)