



DESIGN
IMPACT

PRE-K WORKS

Kindergarten Readiness Kits

2017

HOW MIGHT WE
PROVIDE **EVERY 3-
AND 4-YEAR-OLD**
IN NORTHERN
KENTUCKY WITH
ACCESS TO
HIGH-QUALITY
EARLY LEARNING
EXPERIENCES?

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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Increase enrollment in Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP) in Campbell, Kenton, and Grant County.
- Connect families to local early learning resources.
- Build parents' confidence, and equip them with tools that help prepare their children for kindergarten.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

DESIGNING FOR KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Research shows that early learning, especially from birth to age 5, directly influences a child's ability to learn and succeed in school. However, access to early learning experiences is unequal. First, state funding for public preschool is limited by specific eligibility criteria; Kentucky currently only offers funding for 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities, and 4-year-olds under 160% of poverty. As a result, only 50% of children arrive ready for kindergarten.

In addition, working families need all-day programs, but public preschool is typically only half a day. Education partners across Northern Kentucky were interested in creating a unified branding campaign that could increase community demand for high-quality, full-day preschool across the region.



BEHIND THE SCENES

PARTNERS

- **Design Impact**
Project Leader
- **4C for Children**
Boone County CECC
Brighton Center
Campbell County Library
Campbell, Grant and Kenton Cty. CECC
Children, Inc.
Northern Kentucky Co-Op
Northern Kentucky Education Council
Northern Kentucky Head Start
Northern Kentucky Early Childhood Faculty
Northkey
Pre-K Works
Skyward
United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Community Partners
- **Beechwood Independent**
Bellevue Independent
Boone County
Campbell County
Covington Independent
Dayton Independent
Erlanger-Elsmere Independent
Fort Thomas Independent
Grant County
Kenton County
Ludlow Independent
Newport Independent
Silvergrove Independent
Southgate Independent
Williamstown Independent
School Districts
- **Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood**
Skyward
United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Funder

A SOLID FOUNDATION

Phase 1, focused on research and development, was led by Design Impact, a nonprofit social innovation firm. The phase aimed to wrap up with a campaign aimed at 2,500 low-income families in three Northern Kentucky counties. The goal of the campaign was to increase enrollment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and provide caretakers with the confidence and tools they need to help prepare their kids for school.

To develop the outreach strategy, Design Impact used an approach rooted in *human-centered design*, a participatory problem solving method where end users and other stakeholders play a primary role in developing solutions to meet their needs.

This human-centered approach helps to better understand the motivators that drive parents' and caregivers' decisions around child care and education. This ensures that design and messaging is tailored directly for families.



THE PROCESS



HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN:

A problem-solving process that focuses on understanding and building empathy with users, considering divergent possibilities, and learning through action.

PHASE 1: DISCOVERY

LISTENING TO CAREGIVERS

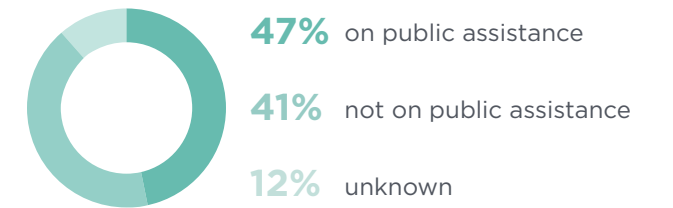
In order to understand the community's needs around children's early learning experiences, it was important to listen to those closest to the problem: parents and caregivers.

Design Impact and United Way conducted one-on-one interviews with 36 caregivers with children under age 5 in urban, suburban and rural areas in Northern Kentucky.

DISCOVERY PRINCIPLES:

- Engage many voices
- Listen and observe
- Avoid assumptions
- Maintain childlike curiosity

WHO WE TALKED TO:



PHASE 2: SYNTHESIS

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS

SENSE-MAKING

One of the trickiest parts of the design process is to make sense of hundreds of data points, or *insights*, that come out during the discovery phase. These insights were categorized into themes. This phase of the design thinking process is called *synthesis*.

Based on these themes, the core team identified major *opportunity spaces*, or topics with high potential for innovation, and used these as a foundation to brainstorm ideas and further develop them into concepts.

SYNTHESIS PRINCIPLES:

- Visualize the data
- Identify themes
- Be comfortable with ambiguity
- Translate insights into design opportunities
- Create insight statements

WHAT WE LEARNED: KEY INSIGHTS

KENTUCKY'S CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP): PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

How might we tap into parents' emotions and beliefs to encourage qualified parents to enroll in CCAP?

- From parents perspective, there is stigma associated with CCAP; one mom shared that when she called a day care facility, the first question they asked "How are you going to pay?" The staff member implied that they only had openings for private payment and not CCAP.
- Parents want autonomy over their child's upbringing and don't want to feel judged by an outsider. Parents feel judged when outside organizations tell them how to raise their children.
- Parents prefer to leave their kids with people they trust, rather than care center staff, due to a lack of a trusting relationship between parents and care centers.

CONNECTING FAMILIES TO LOCAL RESOURCES

How might we leverage the social capital within each community to deliver our message?

- Finding educational opportunities for your kids can be time consuming, especially if you have children of different ages or abilities and/or if you are working.
- Quality is a vague term that holds little to no value for parents who don't have enough knowledge or clear expectations around early learning.
- Many daycare centers have limited hours and lack the flexibility parents need.
- There is "no time to teach" when a parent is busy making ends meet.
- The scarcity of quality/accessible resources has forced caregivers to choose between less than ideal options.

BUILDING AND CULTIVATING CONFIDENCE

How might we tap into parents' emotions and beliefs to participate in high quality learning experiences?

- Parents make decisions around their children's care/education based on instinct, personal experience and emotion rather than data (e.g. a mother chose a child care option because of her gut feeling, even though another option was STAR-rated).
- Parents value the experiences they have with their child since time is limited; "mommy guilt" is real.
- Parents are seeking any type of validation that they are "doing it right."
- Even when moms contribute to their child's learning through every day play and interactions, they don't always equate that to helping their child learn.

PHASE 3: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

THE KINDERKIT

Based on the initial research and additional grant funding through the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood, the core team decided to test their messaging and outreach campaign through the KinderKit, a kindergarten readiness kit that would be distributed to 2,500 CCAP-eligible families across 14 school districts in Northern Kentucky.

A TOOLKIT FOR EARLY LEARNING

The KinderKit includes:

Tools and resources for parents that will help them prepare their children for kindergarten

Activities for kids that target cognitive and emotional skills needed to be "kindergarten ready"

Local resources for extra support for caretakers

Messaging:

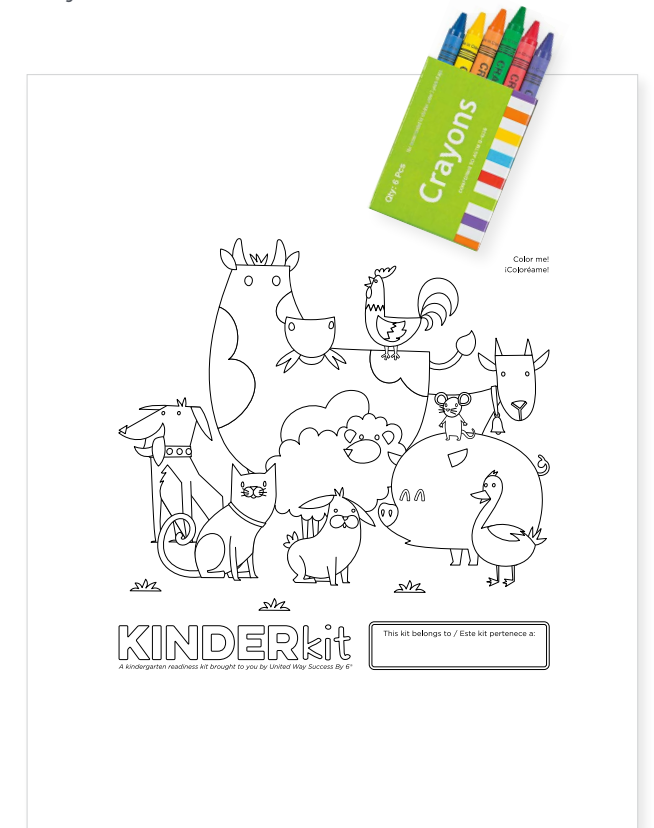
Because parents go to friends and family first for advice, the tone of the KinderKit is friendly, encouraging and conversational. Parents often lack confidence in their ability to teach their kids, so content reassures and validates parents. KinderKits tell parents, "You have the skills, smarts and time to set up your children for academic success!"

KinderKit materials are written in English and Spanish to be inclusive of Kentucky's growing hispanic population.

Design:

KinderKits are primarily blue, a nod to Kentucky, "the Bluegrass State." The kit's other colors, like purple and green, fit easily with other United Way of Greater Cincinnati's materials, including the Born Learning tools.

The playful illustrations seen throughout KinderKits represent Kentucky's urban, suburban and rural neighborhoods, from the unique architecture of Newport and Covington to the barn quilts of Grant County.



KinderKits are delivered in a white paper bag with an illustration that children can color. The back of the bag invites parents to enter a drawing to win aquarium tickets when they complete a feedback survey.

NEXT STEPS

1. Local school districts distribute KinderKits
2. United Way gathers feedback through surveys and small focus groups
3. United Way develops a brand based on parent/caregiver feedback
4. United Way and partners roll out additional platforms for parents, including a website

YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO HELP YOUR CHILD THRIVE

Hey there!

We know raising kids is both rewarding and really, really hard because we've been there. They grow up fast and there never seems to be enough time. Before you know it, your baby is heading off to school!

Your KinderKit is designed to give you and your little one quick and easy ways to have fun, make memories, and learn together. It contains activities for your child as well as lots of great resources in your community that can help you prepare them for kindergarten.

Every child develops at his or her own pace, but you'll know your kiddo is ready for kindergarten when he or she:

- knows and can write his or her full name
- recognizes basic colors and shapes
- plays and shares well with other children
- follows simple rules and routines
- counts sets of objects up to 10
- uses objects or drawings to express ideas or tell a story
- enjoys outdoor play, such as jumping, running and climbing

From the moment they're born, you are your child's most important teacher. So get together, explore, and have fun! You're the expert here—you got this!

Your friends at
KINDERkit

KINDERkit

NEED HELP WITH THE COST OF CHILD CARE OR PRESCHOOL?

I AM *(check all that apply)*

	FAMILY SIZE	MAX ANNUAL INCOME	MAX MONTHLY INCOME
■ a resident of Kentucky	2	\$25,632	\$2,136
■ a parent/caregiver of a child or children under the age of 13	3	\$32,256	\$2,688
■ a parent/caregiver that works at least 20 hours a week or as a household, we work a combined 40 hours a week	4	\$38,880	\$3,240
■ a teen parent in high school or working toward my GED	5	\$45,504	\$3,792
■ able to meet the income requirements listed in the chart on this card	6	\$52,128	\$4,344
	7	\$58,768	\$4,897
	8	\$65,424	\$5,452

If you checked any box, call **(800) 809 7076** or visit **CHILDCARECOUNCILOFKY.COM**

The CCAP postcard is designed to help parents determine whether or not they are eligible for financial assistance with child care.

The introductory letter is written with an encouraging tone and message, and provides parents with a list of indicators related to kindergarten readiness.

YOU HAVE OPTIONS IN CHILD CARE

KINDERkit

SHOOT FOR THE STARS

From local child care centers to in-home providers, we'll help you find the option that cares for your little one like family. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- **Pay attention to how the staff interacts with the children.** Are they engaging them in play or are they left to entertain themselves?
- **Visit unannounced** to see how the center is run when parents aren't around. Always trust your gut! You know when something seems off.
- **Finally, shoot for the stars!** STAR-rated centers and homes show their commitment to quality by entering the ALL STARS program. Their standards are based on key quality indicators: child-to-caregiver ratios, program curriculum, child care staff training, program regulatory compliance and personnel policies.

LOCAL PROVIDERS

Fort Thomas Public Preschool: (859) 781 3333
Kids and Cribz: (859) 441 5888
Abby's Childcare Center: (859) 781 5442
In-Home Provider Referral: (859) 431 2075 or (859) 491 8303 x 2034
Kindergarten Registration: Contact your local elementary school
Johnson Elementary: (859) 441 2444
Moyer Elementary: (859) 441 1180
Woodfill Elementary: (859) 441 0506

PREFER PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED STAFF? LOOK FOR	REQUIRE INFANT CARE? LOOK FOR	NEED FLEXIBLE HOURS? LOOK FOR	WANT A BUDGET FRIENDLY OPTION? LOOK FOR		
Child Care Center	Infant to age 12	Freestanding building, church, or community building	10 - 12 hours a day 5 days a week Year round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff trained in child development • Planned age-appropriate activities • May be eligible for state assistance • Licensed by the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location not always convenient • Larger group size • Little flexibility in hours/days of care • Can be more expensive; fixed costs
Head Start + Early Head Start	6 weeks to age 5	Freestanding building or school	10 - 12 hours a day 4 or 5 days a week School year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff trained in child development • Connection to medical/dental resources • Additional support for families/parents • Licensed by the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location not always convenient • Larger group size • Little flexibility in hours/days of care • Income and eligibility requirements
Family Child Care	Infant to age 12	A home	10 - 12 hours a day 5 days a week Possibly weekends/evenings Year round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child cared for by one provider • Mixed age group/small group size • May be eligible for state assistance • Licensed by the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider experience varies • No daily supervision of provider • Age-appropriate supplies and equipment may be limited
In-Home Care	Negotiable	Child's home	Negotiable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient; no need to transport child • Reduced exposure to illness • Closer provider/child relationship • Flexible schedules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most expensive form of care • Employer obligations (minimum wage, Social Security, taxes, etc.) • Lack of group socialization/activities
Family, Friend, or Neighbor	Negotiable	A home	Negotiable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent knows caregiver • Small group size • Greater availability of programs • Flexible schedules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not licensed by the state • Age-appropriate supplies and equipment may be limited
Public Preschool	Ages 3 to 5	Freestanding building or school	Half day or full day Full or part week School year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff trained in child development • Planned age-appropriate activities • Daily staff supervision and oversight • Services for children with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location not always convenient • Larger group size • Typically not full-day or year round • Transportation typically not available
School-Age	School-age	School or recreation center	Before/after school Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff trained in child development • Planned age-appropriate activities • Transportation available • Licensed by the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location not always convenient • Larger group size • Little flexibility in hours/days of care • May not include summertime care

The "Options in Childcare" flier is designed to help parents and caregivers understand their child care options, comparing key aspects such as cost, hours and age range, all in one place. The list of local providers is unique to each school district.

WATCH ME LEARN + GROW!

KINDERkit

Register for Kindergarten!
Sign up begins in March for children who will be 5 years old before the following August. Sign up at your local school or call (859) 824 3323.

It's time for preschool!
Grant County offers convenient, high-quality preschool programs for children from birth to age 5. To find out if you qualify for financial assistance, call (800) 809 7076.

AT 5 YEARS OLD, I CAN:

- speak very clearly
- count 10 or more objects
- tell what's real and what's make-believe
- follow simple rules and routines
- print some letters and/or numbers

AT 4 YEARS OLD, I CAN:

- tell stories
- understand the ideas of "name" and "different"
- play "house" and/or "school"
- cooperate with other children
- name some colors and/or numbers

AT 3 YEARS OLD, I CAN:

- say my name, age, and gender
- tell words like "I," "me," "my," and "you"
- do puzzles with 3 or 4 pieces
- copy words and tracing
- give simple directions with verbs, animals, and people

AT 2 YEARS OLD, I CAN:

- point to objects and pictures when they are named
- say sentences with 2 to 4 words
- follow simple directions
- get excited when I'm with other children
- begin to tie

AT 18 MONTHS OLD, I CAN:

- say and shake my head "no"
- tell simple phrases words
- play simple pretend, like feeding a doll
- point to something representing hand objects to others as play

AT 1 YEAR OLD, I CAN:

- wave hello and/or shake my head "no"
- copy gestures
- play games like "peek-a-boo"
- use simple words and phrases
- respond to simple spoken requests

Place a 3" x 3" photo of your little "kid" here!

YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD BEST. If your child is not meeting his/her milestones at 18 months (18 months is just a goal), you don't need to worry. MOST STEPS CAN BE TAUGHT. CALL (859) 824 3323.

The growth chart has important information about developmental milestones, and provides information about preschool and kindergarten registration in each school district.

THESE CARDS BELONG TO:

Practice writing your name here

What sound does a cow make?

COW

Practice writing by tracing the letters above

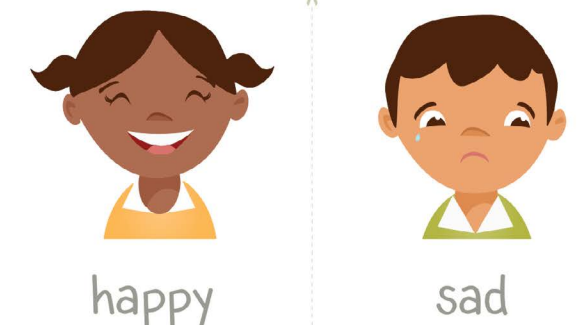
The animal writing cards are laminated and come with a dry erase marker. They help children learn letters and words through writing. Simple activities are included on each card.

"I AM FEELING..."

Use these cards and the simple activities below to help your child learn to recognize and regulate their emotions, as well as empathize with others.

- Have your child pick a card and tell a short story about a time they felt that emotion.
- Tell your child a short story, for example, "Jane's balloon popped." Ask your child to pick the card that shows how Jane would feel if this happened.
- Have your child pick a card without showing you. Tell them to make a face and guess which emotion they picked.
- Have your child pick a card, name the emotion, and discuss what he or she could do if someone around them was feeling this way.
- Set out stuffed animals or dolls and put an emotion card on each one. Speak to the figures as if they were feeling those emotions (this will help your child practice how they can respond to people in different emotional situations).

KINDERkit



The "I Am Feeling..." cards come with activities to help children learn how to understand and express their emotions.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS + INSIGHTS

1. ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SPACES

- Finding educational opportunities for your kids can be time consuming, especially if you have children of different ages and/or if you are working
- Some caretakers use the library as a free alternative to preschool
- Caregivers may want their kids to have access to afterschool programming, but if they are cost-prohibitive, they won't sign up
- Parents with few economic resources need activities that are free in order to prepare their kids for academic success (example, family living in poverty has artwork, games, practice ABCs, etc but can't afford to provide any type of music lesson to their children)

2. DOCTORS AS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

- Many parents reference the importance of advice from doctors before friends and family
- One mom didn't realize she could ask her pediatrician about her son's developmental issues until First Steps recommended she consult her child's doctor
- The doctor's office is one of the main sources of information and resources for parents, regardless of whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural area
- Interviewee didn't realize pediatrician could be a resource for anything beyond her child being sick

3. SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS

- Working parents don't have the time to be actively engaged with their children based on their work schedule
- Caregivers don't always prioritize community learning activities because they don't fit into their busy work schedules. "I get back from work late and I stay home during the weekends..."
- There is "no time to teach" when a parent is busy making ends meet

4. CREATING ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING SITES

- In rural areas, high quality childcare isn't available even for those who can afford it (most aren't star-rated and the few that are have long waitlists)
- Even if people want to take advantage of local educational resources, they can't—in many areas, people don't have access to transportation to the library, parks, etc
- The scarcity of quality/accessible resources has forced caregivers to choose between less than ideal options, even when they recognize there are not the best for their children
- Parent expressed knowing about services and programs his children needed, but he was unable to access them due to transportation

5. SYSTEMS' FAILURE

- Star-rating banners are not always reliable or indicative of high-quality facilities (example: new owner of care center still hands the banner from the previous owner who did run a good facility)
- Changes in CCAP have unforeseen consequences: when CCAP was taken away a few years ago, a high-quality facility was forced to close because enrollment fell drastically; 70 children had no place to go
- Standards for star ratings vary; therefore the system loses credibility because it is not transparent or providing equal access to quality early learning
- Guardian recognizes dyslexia in her child because she has it too, but feel dis-empowered because she's not able to act on it until the child can be tested in 2nd grade
- Policy and legislation are the source of the problem; they don't understand the struggle parents/caregivers face in providing their children with quality day care, especially when it comes to unconventional caregivers
- Even for those who know where to look and how to navigate services, the experience is terrible.
- "Doctors have told me to quit my job, so we'll make a lower income, and qualify for free childcare"

6. ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

- The limitations of the school system leave parents feeling hopeless. For example, one caretaker recognized that her child was struggling with dyslexia and was told she couldn't be tested until second grade
- Caregivers are fearful that if their child is grouped with kids with behavioral issues they won't progress as fast
- Some parents feel like standardized tests are unfair and inaccurate; this leads to frustration and distrust. One mom mentioned her daughter's score dropped in a year because she didn't recite the alphabet in order even though she knew all her letters
- Parents who speak spanish have been instructed not to speak or read in Spanish to their children because it will confuse them; if a parent can't speak English, how are they supposed to help their children?
- Many daycare centers have limited hours and lack the flexibility parents need (For example, parents working second shift are forced to accept sub-par childcare based on their needs/schedule)
- Kids need personalized attention and learning; if they are all in the same room, it detracts attention from some kids when others need more help and oversight
- Parents working full time jobs have less opportunities to actively engage in school activities, however this does not mean that they don't want to be engaged
- When navigating healthcare systems, Hispanics have experienced trade-offs when having to choose between the poor quality services provided in Spanish and the broader and higher-quality services that provide no interpreters or Spanish speaking staff members
- A child may know how to speak English, but can't write in English- this prevents them from being considered "kindergarten ready" even when they are prepared in every other way
- Early learning experiences and milestones in general may look different for parents of children with disabilities
- Public school is the only option because of cost; parents worry that this type of school is only made for one type of learner

- Mom needs to have all of her kids at the same school for convenience even if this school is not the best fit for all of her kids
- Many parents have children with different educational needs, but it can be difficult for parents to accommodate both, especially if schools are in different locations or far apart
- Parents have to compromise due to limited access to special needs resources, time and transportation limitations (especially in Grant County)

7. CHALLENGES FOR NONTRADITIONAL CARETAKERS

- Caretakers that gain custody of children are often left in the dark about social services and the types of tools and resources they may need to provide the children with high-quality learning experiences
- Accessing high-quality educational opportunities is especially difficult for grandparents raising their grandchildren; most are not eligible for CCAP
- It can be difficult to develop a strategy around discipline and other aspects of raising children when co-parents have different schedules and unconventional roles within family dynamics
- Guidelines and regulations for childcare assistance may be well-intentioned, but the lack of flexibility can actually make it harder for caregivers to provide high-quality educational experiences
- Relatives with custody of children do not receive the same support as foster parent; this makes it difficult for them to access high-quality daycare options
- "The system is designed for kids to stay in the foster care system rather than with family." There is no financial support provided to guardians if they are family members, rather than foster parents
- The process of obtaining and maintaining guardianship of a child is frustrating and difficult, and often makes guardians feel powerless, confused and unsupported
- Foster children and/or children placed with family members can present challenges that are unknown or difficult to navigate by their guardians (such as a history of neglect or abuse)

8. PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS OF EARLY LEARNING

- The word “quality” is associated to a degree of professionalism: a trained professional, or an activity/practice previously researched and well thought out
- Parent didn’t know about star rating, the quality of the experience was defined gut feeling and by the quality of the teacher
- Parents value what their kids are learning in daycare or preschool and the intentionality with which it’s taught
- Quality is a vague term that holds little to now value for parents who don’t know enough/have clear expectations around early learning
- When speaking about quality in early education providers, the word was associated only with academics, rather than the whole experience
- Parents are not always able to articulate what “quality” is or looks like
- Mom’s previous negative perceptions around daycare changed after being “forced” to go through that experience with her child; she now recognizes the advantages
- In some homes, quality is more deeply scrutinized/prioritized when it comes to “real school” (kindergarten) than it is for daycare
- A parent’s own upbringing influences their parenting style: they imitate what they liked and challenge/change what didn’t work about the way they were raised or educated
- Parents make decisions around their children’s education based on instinct, personal experience and emotion, not data
- Traditional messages around quality education may not resonate with parents if they don’t trust the source
- The term “high quality” may create a barrier to access educational experiences because parents assume this means it’s expensive
- There is not always a clear understanding of what preschool/daycare are, what kids do there, or why it’s needed
- The perception of daycare is weakened by the fact that it’s not fully integrated into the educational system, but rather, is considered an optional complement
- Parents may make decisions based on inaccurate information that aren’t in the best interest of the child (horror stories of neglect and abuse in daycare)

9. STIGMA AND FEAR OF JUDGEMENT

- There is stigma associated with CCAP; one mom shared that when she called a day care facility the first question was “How are you going to pay?”and implied that they only had openings for private payment and not CCAP
- Parents often lack confidence in themselves regarding parenting ; one mom had a background in education that background gave her the confidence and ability to stay home with her kids prior to entering kindergarten
- Parents want autonomy over their child’s upbringing and don’t want to feel judged by an outsider. Parents feel judged when outside organizations tell them how to raise their children
- When it comes to raising a child, parents won’t share the difficulties and hurdles they are going through for fear of being judged by others

10. PARENTS’ SOCIAL CAPITAL

- When caregivers have a strong social support system in place, each relationship becomes an avenue to access resources, programs, etc
- Moms without support from partner, family, etc, may carry the entire burden of child rearing; this may create a foundational barrier to quality parenting.
- Low income parents who lack a strong support system may have to compromise work vs. childcare
- For some parents, the importance of preschool is not intuitive, in which case an outside organization, resource or peer can support and encourage a parent to enroll their child
- For those new to an area, an employer is often the primary source of information about resources

11. FATHERS MISSING AS EDUCATORS

- Although some moms have husbands or partners, they are often the sole decision maker when it comes to their child’s early learning. Mom mentioned that she felt like a single mom because her husband didn’t participate in her son’s upbringing until he was in preschool
- The majority of women rely on information or resources around early learning outside of their partners. In fact, only one mom (out of 14) included her partner (husband) in her “circle of 6”

12. EMOTION-BASED DECISION MAKING

- Parenting can provide a sense of pride; one parent shared , I’m better at parenting than I thought I would be!” She knows she wants to provide her son with a better upbringing than she had
- Parents value reviews and ratings when it comes to choosing a school, buying a new product, using a service because the testimony of people similar to them provide a preview of what their own experience will be like
- Determination to raise her child better than she was raised has pushed her to be the best for her child despite the odds being against her
- Lifestyle sells: many parents are drawn to experiences rather than products or services
- Parents are able to overcome difficult upbringings if they have a solid network in place
- For better or worse, parents make decisions about their child’s care based on their own experiences
- Helpful/trusted sources of information means it comes from somewhere familiar or from like-minded people (ex. Moms of NKY facebook page)
- The lack of an existing trusting relationship between the parent and the daycare leads parents to prefer leaving kids with people they trust rather than leaving them at a daycare
- Child has only been around mom, they are emotionally independent and confident, but the prospect of kindergarten causes separation anxiety for the child
- Trust is a barrier to enrolling a child in daycare. One mom believes her family will take better care of her son than strangers
- “He’s a little behind (because he was born early) but I am okay with it--he can be my baby for a little bit longer.” Watching your child grow up can be difficult : some parents may feel a void or like they aren’t needed anymore
- Parents feel like they never have enough time with their kids; mommy guilt is real
- Even well-informed and engaged moms are insecure about their parenting. ONe mom teaches her child sign language, reads to her, plays music and encourages artistic expression, and yet she still stated she wasn’t sure what milestones she should be reaching and how to help her child get there

- Moms make decisions based on intuition and gut feeling rather than star ratings
- Undocumented families are not taking advantage of the resources offered to them in their community because there is a trust, fear and ignorance issue
- Sending a child to kindergarten can be an emotionally difficult time for parents. One mom mentioned how nervous she was about sending her daughter to kindergarten after she experienced some bullying in preschool

13. PARENT CONFIDENCE

- A parent felt empowered to offer her child and in-home early learning education herself, rather than enrolling her in daycare; she did so by observing and imitating what what’s happening in daycare, but at home
- Caretakers often depend on teachers to inform the about what is and isn’t normal. They may wait to address an issue because they don’t know it’s an issue until a teacher or doctor bring it up
- When asked about early stages of learning, mom didn’t acknowledge any cognitive skills, but rather, focused on physical things her child was doing
- Father didn’t have a positive experience in school; the way parent experience school and education shapes their attitude when it comes to their kids
- Moms expressed their first child’s learning experience at home had been vastly different that her other kids’. After having more kids, she had more knowledge and experience which positively affected the younger children’s experience
- Parents’ ability to engage in high quality educational experiences depends on the amount and kind of resources available to them (time, technology, tools, etc)
- Parents may only seek information when their child is sick or they have an immediate question, which doesn’t promote being ahead of the game in terms of development
- When it comes to behavior, teachers and even babysitters, as outsiders, demand a different kid on respect than parents do
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- Parents are dependent on their children's school for information about their development, however, they don't always trust the school system to prepare their children and provide them with a quality education
- Some parents feel guilty or don't want to be seen as the "bad guy," so they avoid disciplining their children or teaching them appropriate behavior

14. PARENTS AS TEACHERS

- Parents don't always know to stimulate learning with kids during early childhood; they don't know how to when they're "too young"
- Even when moms are contributing to their child's learning through everyday play and other interactions, they don't always equate that to contributing to their child's overall learning
- Mother recognized what her child was learning at school, and started reinforcing it at home every day through simple games, activities that make it fun for kids (e.g. counting while going up the stairs, teaching "tricks" to do things easier, like putting on a jacket)
- Parents are resourceful and find or create activities to help their children learn. They are innovative in finding solutions that work; for example, one when everything else failed, one mom used a frozen French fry to help soothe her teething baby
- Parents might have a formulaic understanding of what it means to have "quality early learning experiences" and be "kindergarten-ready," but this does not guarantee that they are reinforcing these habits/skills at home
- A stay at home mother commented she has somewhat of a structure when it comes to teaching her kids at home. There are designated hours of the day when the kids do educational activities
- A mom recognizes that experiential learning helps reinforce what her kids are learning (e.g. "if they read about penguins, I take them to see them in real life at the zoo")
- Parents who know what their kids are learning in school, are doing simple and creative things at home to help their kids learn, practice and reinforce them (e.g. words and numbers printed big on the wall at home, have kids read out loud every time they pass by)
- Parents are seeking any type of validation that they are "doing it right"

- Parents use every day moments (driving in the car, putting a puzzle together, etc.) as learning opportunities, but they don't identify them as "early learning experiences"
- Parents have a perception that learning can only happen in a formal way; mom gave herself little recognition to her her ability to influence/contribute to her child's learning
- Many parents do not have confidence in their abilities to offer their children high-quality educational experiences because they are not "experts"
- Parents use everyday moments to teach and encourage a child's curiosity. Counting in the kitchen, cooking, etc...
- Some parents don't realize they're the kids' first teachers - or that the environment at home is equally (if not more) important than the child care environment
- Parents with multiple children understand that there is a learning opportunity for younger kids to learn from older siblings. (A parent found that helping her son with his homework, in company of his little sister, was a beneficial learning experience for the younger child)
- Mother assumes kids should learn certain skills at school, not recognizing there are easy ways to do the same at home

15. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

- Spanish speaking parents are often told by teachers not to speak to their children in Spanish, however, many parents don't speak English. There is a fear that speaking to them in their native language will "mix them up"
- Parents want to be kept up to date on their child's progress. They are well-informed and engaged in their child's learning. Communication is key for success
- If parents don't know the full extent of what kids learn and focus on at preschool, they can't help to reinforce those learnings at home
- Messages parents hear may not be accurate or on point (for example, "you don't need much to be kindergarten ready- just numbers, colors and letters")

16. CONFUSION AROUND ROLES

- Some parents understand their role as a child's first teacher; others believe that learning starts at school
- Parents can be passive teachers if they don't recognize that their children can benefit from them reinforcing at home what they think of as school-related skills" (example: counting, ABCs)
- Mother expects her child's school to indicate whether or not he's "kindergarten ready"

17. DEFINING READINESS AND COMMUNICATING MILESTONES

- Parents rely on school to assess whether or not kids are ready for kindergarten. - "I wish I knew requirements and milestones needed before entering kindergarten"
- Mother expects her child's school to indicate whether or not he's "kindergarten ready"
- Some parents do not associate early learning experiences with a child's first few years. When asked about how her 18-month-old son learns, a mom responded, "I don't know. He's only 18 months"
- Perceptions of what kids should or shouldn't be doing or learning at certain stages change depending on what parents see other children (who might be close in age) are doing
- Some parents recognize there is a higher level of expectations in kindergarten; "I want him to learn letters and numbers now. I don't want him to have to learn them at kindergarten because I think now kids need to learn those things beforehand
- Parents expect to "see" and experience quality in the form of progress/growth, which may come at different times for different children
- Readiness standards are unclear to parents and not well communicated in time for parents to properly prepare kids
- "The moment kids enter kindergarten should be determined based on readiness testing/evaluation from preschool teacher, because not all kids are ready at the same time"
- Parents aren't sure what the right solutions are for behavioral challenges like biting and they aren't sure where to go to find them

18. TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Some parents may not trust the school system itself; some parents may not buy into the notion of "kindergarten readiness" if they feel it stems from a self-serving school program
- Word of mouth referrals cannot be underestimated particularly across common demographics (single, at risk moms, neighborhoods, other social networks, etc)
- Parents may choose less-quality daycare or preschool options because they don't trust the alternatives
- Relationships with parents can be fragile, it takes commitment and showing up every time to build consistent trust; you need a solid foundation before expecting someone to accept your services
- Parents may distrust non-family members with their children; negative experiences with daycare child care can lead to a parent keeping their kids out of structured educational programs
- When it comes to choosing child care, parents will choose a facility with staff they trust and have relationships with, over a high star rating. Reputation and word of mouth are key

19. IMPACT OF COST/INCOME

- Preschool is cost prohibitive for many parents. Because of this, kindergarten is the first experience some children have with formal education. The kids are often behind academically, socially, and emotionally
- Being fully aware of the benefits of preschool and how they play out in the long run, mother was eager to enroll all kids in preschool, but was not eligible
- Some parents want to work but can't afford to, even with CCAP. Others may make just over the financial limit to qualify for CCAP and can't afford to pay for child care. Because of this, some parents have to stay home with their children
- The expenses associated with preschool and high-quality learning opportunities create major barriers, even for middle-income families, especially summer programs
- Some parents won't be activated to enroll their kids in childcare unless they have an affordable or free option to do so

- Parents can't afford childcare for more than one child. One mom recognized how daycare had benefited her older child, but she can't afford it for her younger two. Daycare took her entire salary and part of her husbands,' so she quit and stayed at home with them
- For some parents, the benefits of preschool do not outweigh a free childcare option provided by a trusted resource such as a family member
- Parent engagement may be lower among low income families who have less mobility and less options
- Messages may fall short if they are not tailored to each community and family (texts, library, school, etc)
- Parents may miss important information (registration dates, etc) if they're not connected to or receiving information from the few sources that exist
- Older adults who are raising kids may prefer physical rather than digital materials/media when it comes to communication
- Mom learns about activities, resources and events in the community through word of mouth and internet, but noted there is no central place to get all the information from

20. METHODS AND APPROACHES OF COMMUNICATION

- Parents whose children are not in preschool can be disconnected from information and resources; schools are not always successful in reaching families who are not currently engaged
- Many parents lack the support they need in providing their children with high quality educational experiences; without a connection to resources, parents are often at a loss when it comes to solving parenting challenges
- Even when all the right touchpoints and connections to services are in place, some families are hard to reach and don't take advantage of what is being offered
- Parents have pointed out that public places with wide accessibility and foot traffic are the best places to spread the word about local resources and programs
- Caregivers may need more direction on how/where to find resources in the community; "you won't be on the lookout if you don't know what it is you're trying to find
- Kenton County library functions as a community hub; it is a centrally located place where families attend events and get information about community resources; even when these are happening outside of the library
- Early education terminology can feel distant and disconnected to parents. A mom indicated that "family engagement" and other terms were over utilized and had lost all meaning to her
- Many parents prefer things that are "handmade with pride" - generic messaging and mass-produced goods have little appeal to parents
- Messaging needs to have an emotional component, rather than be data-driven, in order to resonate with most parents
- For some parents, words like education, learning and teaching, are solely associated to in-school/academic experiences, rather than at-home experiences
- Advertisements with empowering, encouraging and emotional undertones resonate with mothers of young children
- The traditional means of advertising (ads, commercials) are not particularly appealing to our demographic
- Parents get ideas for educational activities or games from the internet
- Phone and e-mail aren't always the best ways to reach people, this is based on convenience
- We can't assume parents know what we are referring to when we offer suggestions, guidelines and advice. This information should be given in an accessible manner (with context); it might be better to assume the parent lacks experience (especially when it comes to first time parents)

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