



Every Child Ready Duluth

Strategic Plan 2021-2023



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We especially want to recognize the **ECRD Steering Committee** who spent countless hours sharing their insights and assisting with the development of this plan.

- **Carl Crawford**, City of Duluth Human Rights Officer & [Family Freedom Center](#) Vice President
- **Lynn Haglin**, Northland Foundation Vice President & [KIDS PLUS](#) Director
- **Molly Harney, Ph.D**, University of Minnesota Duluth, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Studies
- **Jen Jaros**, ISD 709 [Early Childhood Family Education](#) Coordinator
- **Amber Lightfeather**, [Duluth Indigenous Commission](#) member, American Indian Parent Advisory Committee ([Duluth Edison Charter Schools](#), Chair and [ISD 709 Schools](#), Vice Chair), and [Duluth Edison Charter Schools Executive Board](#) member
- **Jana Nachtsheim**, [St. Mary's Birthplace \(Essentia Health\)](#) Nurse Manager
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- **Sheryl (Sherry) Williams**, ISD 709 [Duluth Preschool](#) Director
- **Heather Winesett**, M.D., [St. Luke's Pediatric Associates](#) Pediatrician

Thank you to the Duluth Library Foundation and the City of Duluth, for sharing the vision for this library-led initiative, financially standing behind it, and advocating for it. Thank you to the Duluth Public Library Board and the Friends of the Duluth Public Library for believing in it, advocating for it, and consistently representing the needs of the library to City leadership. Thank you to Duluth Mayor Emily Larson and Public Administration Director Jim Filby Williams for embracing this initiative and recognizing that it is consistent with their vision of Duluth as a place of equal opportunity for all. Finally, we want to thank the Duluth Public Library staff for making school readiness a priority and dedicating time, ideas, and resources to launch the initiative.

ECRD Planning Team

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Community Challenge, Library-Led Solution

The Duluth Public Library: The Duluth Public Library (DPL) serves a population of more than 86,000 citizens at three locations across the City of Duluth, Minnesota. Each library location serves as a unique community hub and provides free resources, digital access, and engaging programs. Enriching services and programs for children and families have always been one of DPL's highest priorities.

The Challenge: In the library's most recent five-year strategic plan, which was based on community feedback, the first goal focuses on implementing a long-term campaign to improve school readiness. For years, fewer than half of Duluth's children entering kindergarten have been considered school ready by the Duluth Public School District ISD 709. The consequences for those children who are not school ready can be staggering: lower income over their lifetimes, poorer health for themselves and their children, and reduced civic engagement. Research shows that improvement in early school readiness supports can have a significant impact, improving children's life outcomes and helping close the opportunity gap.

The Solution: The library forged a new initiative, Every Child Ready Duluth (ECRD), with the aim that every child in Duluth entering kindergarten will be school ready.

How do we define school readiness?

- The Head Start program says "school [kindergarten] readiness occurs when children have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in primary school, later learning, and life."
- The Minnesota Department of Education also acknowledges interconnected factors, including the "essential ingredients of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development," and approaches to learning such as curiosity and confidence. ¹
- Positive, supportive relationships and the development of social-emotional skills are key. Parents are their child's first teachers and interactions with parents and caregivers strongly influence young children's skills and development.
- Before learning and growing can best happen, children and their parents need to be safe, secure, and have their basic needs met.
- The Northland Foundation states, "Children benefit when their families are involved in their learning and development, but it takes everyone working together—parents, caregivers, schools, and communities—to help children be confident and successful learners!"²

In order to address these varied aspects of school readiness, it will take a coordinated community effort that provides support and educational opportunities for parents and

¹ From <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/kreadi/index.htm>

² <https://northlandfdn.org/news/publications/getting-school-ready-guide.pdf>

caregivers and their children birth to kindergarten. The ECRD initiative is therefore collaborating with community partners and developing a coalition to help bridge the gaps in school readiness throughout Duluth. The collective planning process has involved organizations, individuals, and businesses already working to educate, care for, and support young children in Duluth. Moving forward, we will form working groups for specific activities to bring together community partners working toward similar goals. These partner relationships are critical for ECRD's success.

The ECRD initiative is receiving sustained support from the City of Duluth and the Duluth Library Foundation through 2022. After that, it is anticipated that the City of Duluth will continue to support ECRD and the Duluth Library Foundation is committed to the initiative's success.

This document details the comprehensive plan for ECRD, including the vision, mission, strategic directions, and goals. A separate activity plan will help launch the initiative in a more detailed way. We plan to review and update the activity plan on a regular basis. Activities will change as needed as we work with partner organizations, families, community members, and businesses to implement this plan.

DPL remains committed to improving school readiness in Duluth by addressing the early childhood needs in the community. This plan is the framework for purposeful, inspired collaboration among early childhood practitioners, families and caregivers, partner organizations, and all those working to improve school readiness for young children in our community.

Planning Process & Data Highlights

In order to create a cohesive, actionable plan, ECRD reviewed a wide variety of community research and existing program models, administered a community organization survey, and conducted interviews and community input sessions. The ECRD Planning Team spent time consulting with various community partners who oversee different aspects of early childhood learning and development in the Duluth area.³

The community survey was completed by representatives from 65 local organizations. Feedback indicated the need for several improvements in early childhood services in order to improve school readiness including:

- improved access to quality childcare
- increased awareness about early childhood milestones, adverse childhood experiences, and developmental timelines
- strengthened services to meet basic needs such as food and housing

³ See full *Learning Report* in Appendix.

- enhanced communication channels with more clearly defined roles among community organizations working to meet these needs.

A total of 12 early childhood organization members participated in interviews. Input from the interviews revealed a number of struggles that parents and caregivers of young children are facing. Participants also identified strong points in Duluth’s early childhood environment and discussed how ECRD can work to strengthen this network. This data-gathering phase resulted in a Learning Report (see Appendix I) that guided the next steps in the process and helped the Planning Team develop an initial plan outline.

Due to COVID-19, we were unable to hold a planned summit to develop plan elements with community partners and stakeholders. Instead, we held a series of virtual community input sessions where participants identified potential gaps in early childhood services that impact school readiness. Their input echoed the need to increase awareness of services for parents and caregivers. Further input sessions with parents are included in our strategic plan activities.

After the community input sessions, early childhood organization members were also asked to provide input via a survey about the draft strategic plan outline, which helped us ensure the plan represented a comprehensive view of what it takes for children to be school-ready and for systems and institutions to be ready to support children and families.

After reviewing the research and evaluation data, the ECRD Planning Team and Steering Committee collaborated to draft vision, mission, and commitment statements, determine the strategic directions, develop goals, and define activities.



Vision

Every child in Duluth has the opportunities and support needed to learn and succeed in kindergarten and beyond. We are committed to supporting children of every race, color, culture, creed, ability, family status, gender identity, and family income.

School readiness is a building block for success in formal education and beyond. We acknowledge the library's commitment in its strategic plan to focus the initiative city-wide and to be inclusive of *all* children and families.

Mission

Every Child Ready Duluth unites families, caregivers, educators, and community partners to advance Duluth's capacity to support children's development so they are prepared and excited to learn when entering kindergarten.

While the library will organize the work of the initiative, ECRD will operate as a coalition, bringing together key areas of the community to create the changes needed to support children in becoming school ready. The spirit of this mission is also closely held by many organizations and individuals in our community and we invite them to join with us for collective impact.

Commitment

We will work to remove barriers and foster a community network to equitably support, educate, and advocate for young children of Duluth and their families. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are intentionally woven throughout all goal areas and activities.

Core to the ECRD initiative is diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Several of our goals directly address DEI issues and even when not directly articulated, DEI is part of every element of our plan, including our plans for initiative evaluation.



Strategic Directions

This plan is divided into four strategic directions based on this **School Readiness Equation⁴**:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Ready Community +} \\ &\text{Ready Education System \& Early Childhood Educators +} \\ &\text{Ready Families \& Caregivers =} \\ &\text{Ready Child} \end{aligned}$$

The Minnesota Department of Education, along with several national organizations, state that the work of achieving school readiness goes beyond the role of the child. It refers to “not only ready children, but ready communities, families, and schools and early care and education (ECE) programs.”

Children can’t get themselves school ready. They rely on their families to help them develop healthy relationships, build necessary social and emotional skills, and to encourage their curiosity and creativity. They need a strong education system that connects with, responds to, and supports them and their parents and caregivers. A community that values, prioritizes, and advocates for school readiness helps children and families to thrive. Together, these concentric rings of support—family, education, and community—can help Duluth’s children become school ready.

The ECRD initiative provides an opportunity to help the whole city of Duluth understand school readiness and embrace it as a priority for a healthy community. Many local organizations are already providing important services and resources to improve school readiness and ECRD hopes to increase communication and collaboration between such groups to create a more equitable and interconnected system of early childhood care and education.

⁴ Based on [Minnesota Department of Education’s Kindergarten Readiness Definition](#).

This plan is divided into these four strategic directions: Ready Community, Ready Education System & Early Childhood Educators, Ready Families & Caregivers, and Ready Child. Each direction is broken down into actionable goals. The ECRD coalition will collaborate with the community, educators, parents, and families to implement activities aimed at achieving the goals—meeting children and families where they are while maintaining an eye to systemic improvements that can be made.

Goals, Activities, Measures

The following graphic summarizes the ECRD strategic plan, followed by additional detail for each strategic direction, including potential activities for each goal and possible metrics. An activity plan will serve as an implementation guide.



Every Child Ready Duluth

VISION

Every child in Duluth has the opportunities and support needed to learn and succeed in kindergarten and beyond. We are committed to supporting children of every race, color, culture, creed, ability, family status, gender identity, and family income.

MISSION

Every Child Ready Duluth unites families, caregivers, educators, and community partners to advance Duluth's capacity to support children's development so they are prepared and excited to learn when entering kindergarten.

COMMITMENT

We will work to remove barriers and foster a community network to equitably support, educate, and advocate for young children of Duluth and their families. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are intentionally woven throughout all goal areas and activities.

Strategic Plan 2021-2023



Ready Community

Community members, businesses, healthcare providers, and organizations recognize that investing in early childhood education benefits the community. They understand the scope of school readiness and actively support culturally informed, community-based efforts to ensure that all young children are prepared for school.



Ready Education System & Early Childhood Educators

Education systems, including child care environments and the public library, are equipped to support all young children in becoming school ready in developmentally, age appropriate, and culturally inclusive ways. Educators have strong community partners to support their efforts.



Ready Families & Caregivers

Families have an understanding of early child development and the importance of secure attachments. Parents understand they are their child's advocate and first teacher. They have access to needed resources and are supported in their efforts to prepare their children for school.



Ready Child

Children entering kindergarten approach learning with curiosity and confidence. Their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development readies them for optimal school success based on their unique abilities and characteristics. Ready children have been supported from birth by relationships with caring adults who understand the importance of positive early childhood experiences and play-based learning.



Ready Community

Our vision for a Ready Community...

Community members, businesses, healthcare providers, and organizations recognize that investing in early childhood education benefits the community. They understand the scope of school readiness and actively support culturally informed, community-based efforts to ensure that all young children are prepared for school.

Because school readiness is multi-faceted and involves a variety of sectors, the ECRD initiative is bringing together a coalition of community partners to inform and advance the work on school readiness. One of our first steps will be to create a culture of community awareness around the critical importance of school readiness and the early childhood education and services that support it. Initiative partners will collaborate to improve communication efforts through a variety of channels in the community, building support within the business, nonprofit, healthcare, and education communities. Together we will learn more about the barriers to school readiness in Duluth. Through community messaging and advocacy, we will lay the foundation for a united initiative that comes alongside families to better support their needs.

Goals	Possible Activities
1. Create a coalition of community partners committed to supporting Duluth's children (prenatal to kindergarten) and their families, and together introduce and enhance services and practices related to school readiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and maintain a contact list and network map of groups and organizations working with young children and their families • Form working groups to address priority activities
2. Communicate broadly about the various aspects contributing to school readiness to foster a community that invests in resources for families and makes decisions with our youngest generation's best interest in mind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a working group to develop common messages and a communications plan • Further develop the ECRD website
3. Through education and advocacy, work to eliminate the barriers to school readiness with attention to adverse childhood experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the Learning Report and expand to include family-level input about barriers • Develop and give presentations about school readiness

Potential Measures of Success

- Community awareness survey regarding elements of school-readiness
 - Working group engagement and progress
 - Number of presentations given
 - Post-presentation survey of awareness about school-readiness elements
-



Ready Education System & Early Childhood Educators

Our vision for a Ready Education System & Early Childhood Educators...

Education systems, including child care environments and the public library, are equipped to support all young children in becoming school ready in developmentally, age appropriate, and culturally inclusive ways. Educators have strong community partners to support their efforts.

A strong network of early childhood programs, childcare providers, and community organizations helps parents feel supported and knowledgeable as they help their children prepare for and transition into kindergarten. Collaboration between and support for child care providers and teachers are crucial to creating and maintaining a vital early childhood education system. Early education and child care that is developmentally-appropriate, culturally-sensitive, and trauma-informed should be available to all children despite income or background. ECRD acknowledges that education environments must be welcoming to and representative of all peoples and cultures.

Goals	Possible Activities
<p>1. Create a close partnership between Duluth School District ISD 709, charter, and private schools, Duluth Public Library and the ECRD coalition to support children in early education systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECRD team members serve on school-readiness committees • Reach out to charter and private schools to learn more about existing pre-k and k programs and resources
<p>2. Partner with area preschools, child care centers, and home-based child care by connecting with them to identify and provide needed resources in order to create high quality early childhood care and education experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with childcare providers one-on-one to learn about needs and share resources • Develop handout/resource for childcare providers to promote what is available at DPL for support
<p>3. Ensure children and families of all cultures feel valued and comfortable sharing and celebrating their family's culture, traditions, and values within early childhood care and education settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with culturally-specific parent groups in the schools and community • Increase representation and visibility of cultural diversity in education, childcare, and library spaces, resources, and activities

Potential Measures of Success

- Meetings with school administrators and teachers
 - Participation on school-readiness committees
 - Number of meetings with childcare providers
 - Number of resources shared with childcare providers
-



Ready Families & Caregivers

Our vision for Ready Families & Caregivers...

Families have an understanding of early child development and the importance of secure attachments. Parents understand they are their child's advocate and first teacher. They have access to needed resources and are supported in their efforts to prepare their children for school.

As their children's first teachers, parents need equitable, and easy access to information and community resources to help them provide the best learning environments and early childhood experiences for their unique children. Parents and families come from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. In order to best understand their diverse needs and support them, ECRD will engage with families directly to incorporate their input about school readiness and feedback about this initiative into ECRD's activities. Strengthening relationships with families will improve ECRD's responsiveness and relevance to Duluth's children.

Goals	Possible Activities
1. Ensure parents and families have opportunities to learn about child development, parenting, and school readiness, and embrace their child's individual needs in order to have a successful school experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and provide information resources, presentations, and outreach events for parents regarding early child development and school-readiness • Promote learning opportunities and services available in the Duluth community
2. Connect parents and families to information and community resources regarding healthcare, housing, food security, income security, and other needed services and empower them to utilize these services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-promote coalition organization resources and make them more readily available to parents • Working with partners, promote the library as a location for connecting with social services and a center for parenting resources and family activities
3. Build relationships with parents and create opportunities for parents and families to engage in dialogue, learn together, and provide input about the initiative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn more about parent needs by conducting listening sessions or attending parenting groups • Create a parent advisory group for ECRD

Potential Measures of Success

- Number of presentations and outreach events provided and number of attendees
 - Number of partner organizations in coalition supporting parents
 - Number of parent volunteers
 - Conduct parent needs survey
-



Ready Child

Our vision for a Ready Child...

Children entering kindergarten approach learning with curiosity and confidence. Their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development readies them for optimal school success based on their unique abilities and characteristics. Ready children have been supported from birth by relationships with caring adults who understand the importance of positive early childhood experiences and play-based learning.

Improving access to resources that positively contribute to a child’s health and well-being will help parents and caregivers support their child’s development. Young children learn primarily through the relationships with their parents and families and through play. Increasing equitable access to play-centered learning programs, resources, and spaces that engage children and their caregivers together, will help children become curious and excited to learn when they enter kindergarten.

Goals	Possible Activities
1. Support the development of strong, healthy relationships between adults and children so children have the resilience to cope with challenges and are confident in their inherent worth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programming for caregivers and children to foster healthy social-emotional growth • Develop and pilot programs and events focused on teen and young adult parents
2. Promote and provide opportunities, resources, and spaces for children to build key developmental and early learning skills through play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop community messages about the importance of play as learning, including resource and activity guide identifying play spaces in the community • Promote and provide opportunities and events for adults to engage with children in playful learning
3. Collaborate to increase children’s access to resources that support their physical and mental well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners to integrate healthcare topics and resources into ECRD events • Provide and promote more accessible opportunities for early childhood screenings

Potential Measures of Success

- Number of programs and events and attendance
 - Community awareness survey includes play as learning question(s)
 - Event participant evaluation (organization and attendee)
-



Next Steps & Evaluation

The ECRD strategic plan is intended to guide activities through 2023, the first part of this ongoing initiative. The plan is divided into three phases as follows:



Review and adjustment of the activity plan will happen on a regular basis. COVID-19 has created challenges for our community that necessitate flexibility in activity implementation. Project launch and the implementation of activities begins in 2021.

Evaluation: In order to deepen and measure ECRD's impact, the ECRD Planning Team is developing an evaluation framework with assistance from Colibri, a social change coaching and consulting business. The evaluation framework will be completed by Spring 2021. Methods for evaluating progress on each goal and its activities will vary. Some goals will be evaluated through data from community partner organizations and families and others will be evaluated through information collected in-house, such as program participation records and social media analytics. Since much of the first year of the strategic plan focuses on designing, organizing, and coordinating activities, the success of some of this work will be based on the completion of deliverables, like plans for outreach and communication. Reflecting and reporting on successes and challenges will help ensure that ECRD practices continuous learning, is transparent about progress, and is responsive to input.

The Library commits to a comprehensive review at the end of Phase Three to reflect on progress made toward the goals and plan for the next phase of the initiative. It is our intention that over the next three years, ECRD will become embedded into the community by bringing together a broad group of community members, educators, early childhood caregivers, parents, nonprofits, businesses, and other stakeholders to focus on Duluth's children, birth to kindergarten. We invite you to join us in whatever capacity best suits your strengths as we work to ensure Duluth's young children are ready for school.



Every Child Ready Duluth Learning Report

Submitted by Amanda E. Standerfer, MA, MLIS;
Sarah Forbes, PhD.; and Laura Huddleston, MLIS
June 2020

Introduction

During the Duluth Public Library's (DPL) last strategic planning process, school readiness emerged as a priority. School success is based on a multitude of factors including physical growth, mental well-being, social and emotional development, health, safety, economic stability, and learning opportunities available for all children and families. The library and the MN Department of Education know that school readiness goes beyond just children and [involves families, early environments, schools, and communities.](#)

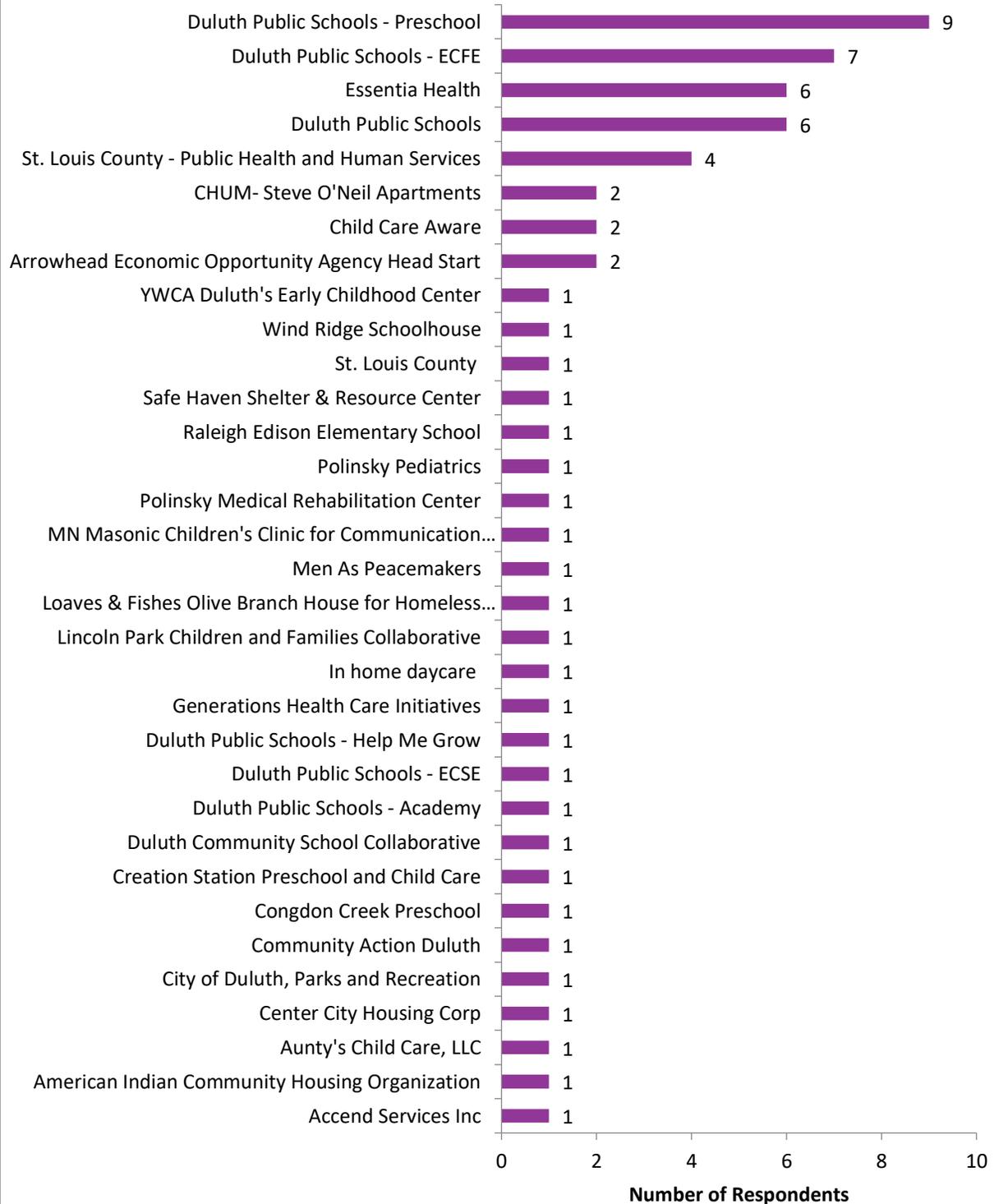
Echoing the Minnesota Department of Education's [definition for kindergarten readiness](#), DPL recognizes that children cannot get themselves school-ready and has launched the Every Child Ready Duluth (ECRD) initiative to help bridge the gap in school readiness across the city. The initiative leverages funding from the library, the library's foundation, and the City of Duluth to develop a network of individuals, organizations, and businesses concerned about early childhood, and the long-term impact of low rate of school readiness.

To launch ECRD, the library engaged [Fast Forward Libraries](#) to help develop a strategic plan to guide the initiative. This report is a result of the planning process's learning phase and brings together information gathered from a community organization survey, interviews, community research, and program models. Sector stakeholders reviewed a draft of this report and provided feedback that was incorporated throughout. Additional opportunities for input from stakeholders to make meaning of the findings of this learning report and begin to build plan elements is planned for 2020. The resulting strategic plan will aspire to bring alignment around shared goals and define roles to increase collaboration.

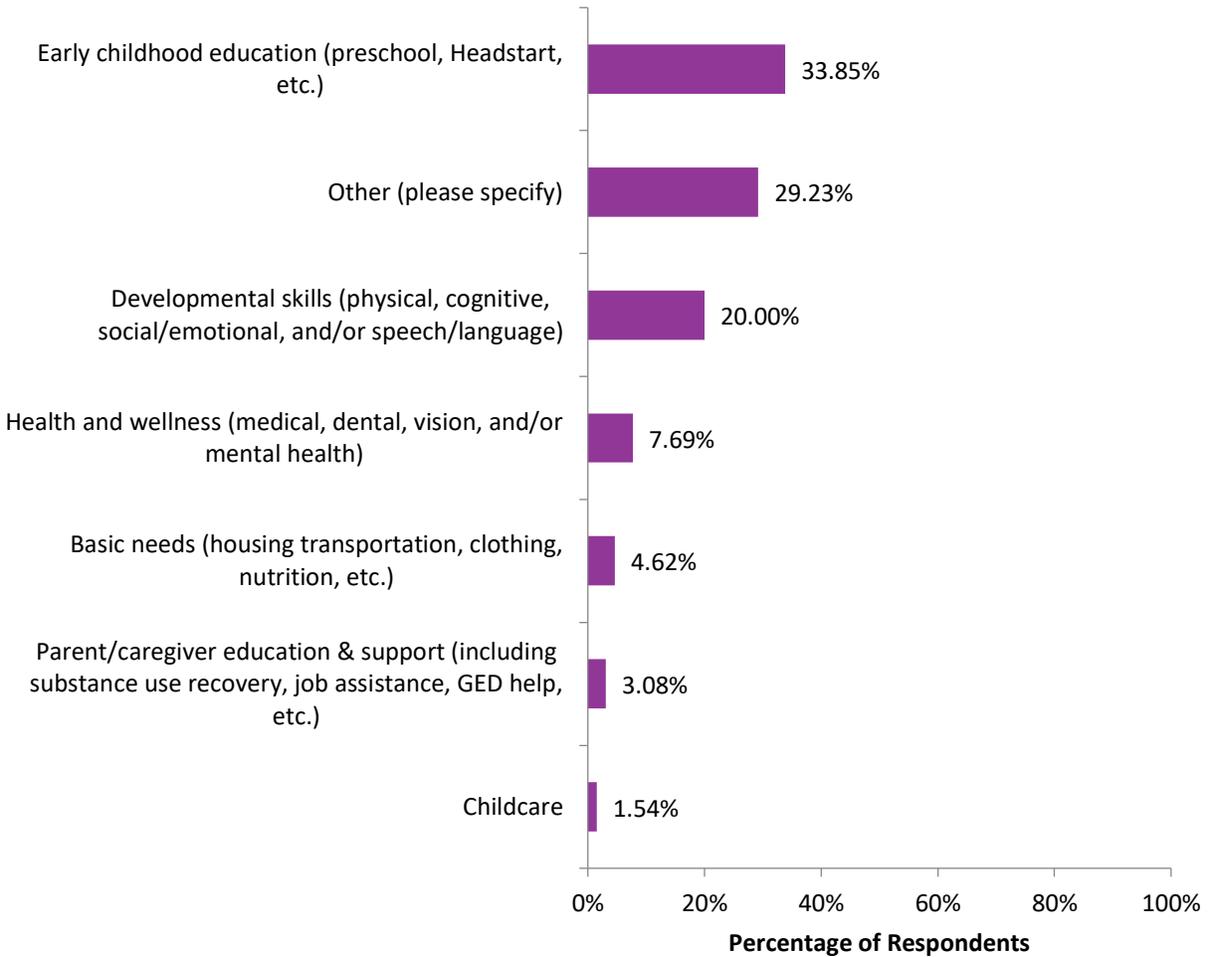
Community Organization Survey

ECRD conducted a survey to identify the network of organizations that support pre-k children and their families/caregivers in their school readiness efforts. A total of 65 community organization members responded to the SurveyMonkey survey. The questions and corresponding answers are presented in the below charts and graphs.

Organization you work for/represent:



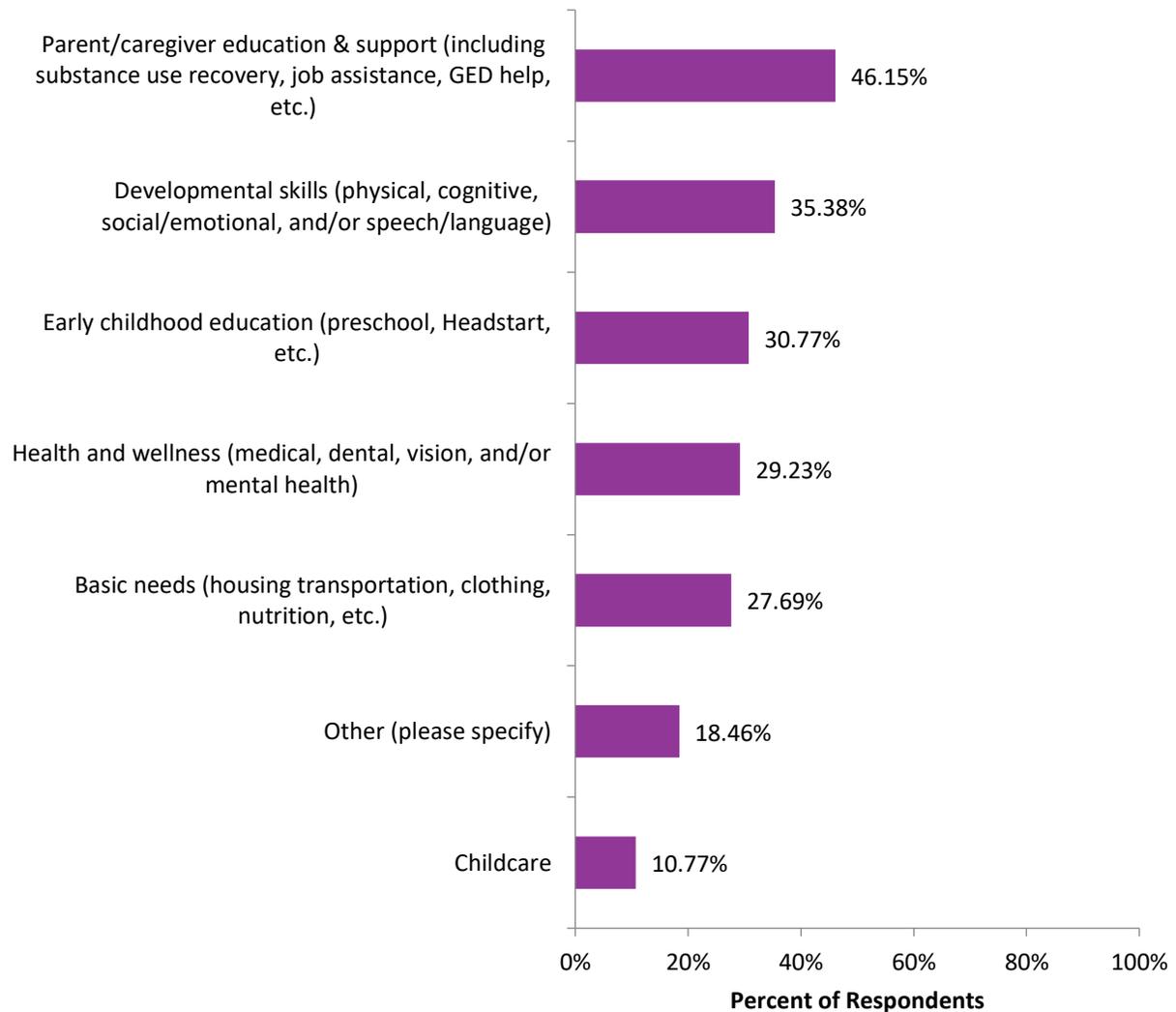
My organization's primary mission is in:



Other organization mission:

- Child and family safety and wellness; violence prevention; child protection services; children and families collaborative
- K-8 education; school equity; early childhood special education; early childhood family education
- Community health; parks and recreation

Secondary to my organization's primary mission, we also work in (check all that apply):



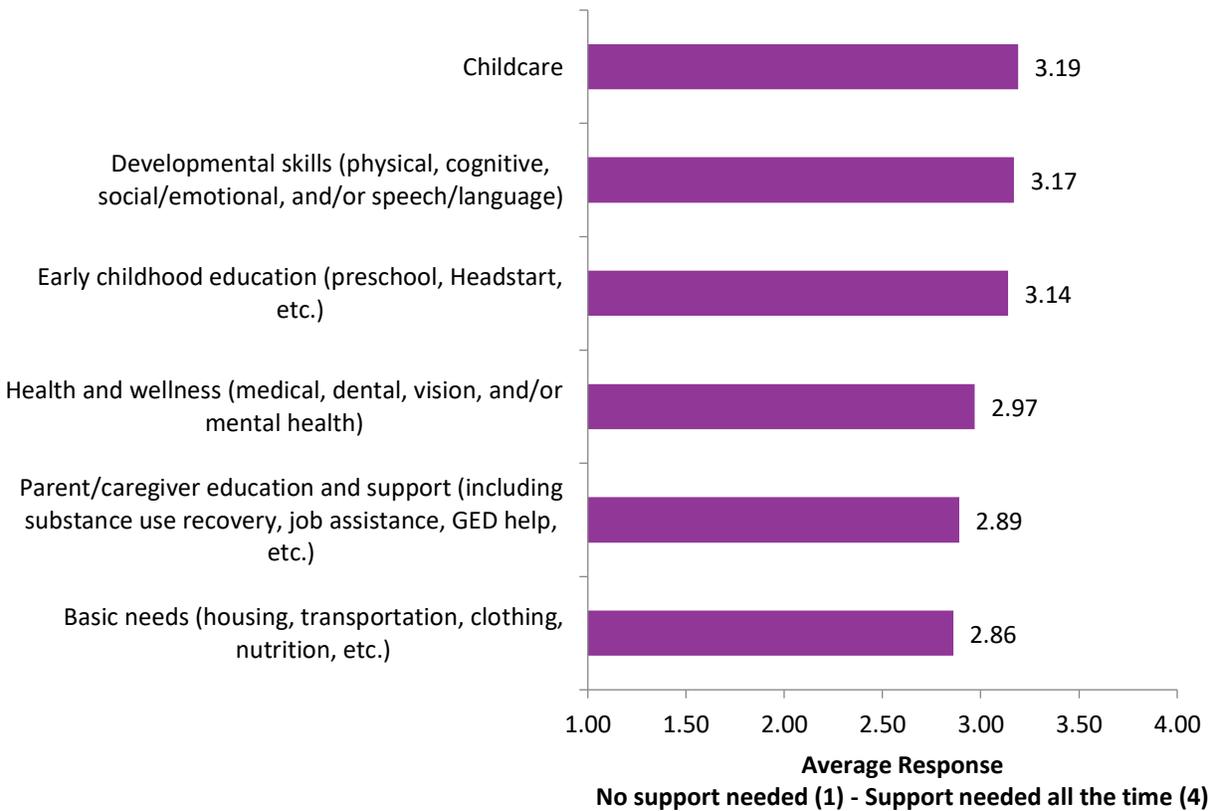
Other secondary mission:

- Prenatal education; parenting classes; child care needs for children with special needs; supervised visitation
- Early childhood environmental education; social and emotional health
- Gender equity; graduation and suspension disparities

What kind of support do you think families/caregivers need to ensure that children in our community are ready for kindergarten?

- **For Families:** Basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter; livable wages and financial support; transportation; health and wellness; family therapy; support for addiction, mental health issues, and trauma
- **For Parents/Caregivers:** Parent/caregiver education, such as developmental timelines and achievements, and speech language and milestones; free resources for home education; awareness of community resources and programs; parent and child activities
- **For Children:** High quality and affordable early childhood programs and providers; preschool screening; social and emotional readiness; pre-literacy experiences; fine and gross motor opportunities; unstructured play; discovery and exploration programs

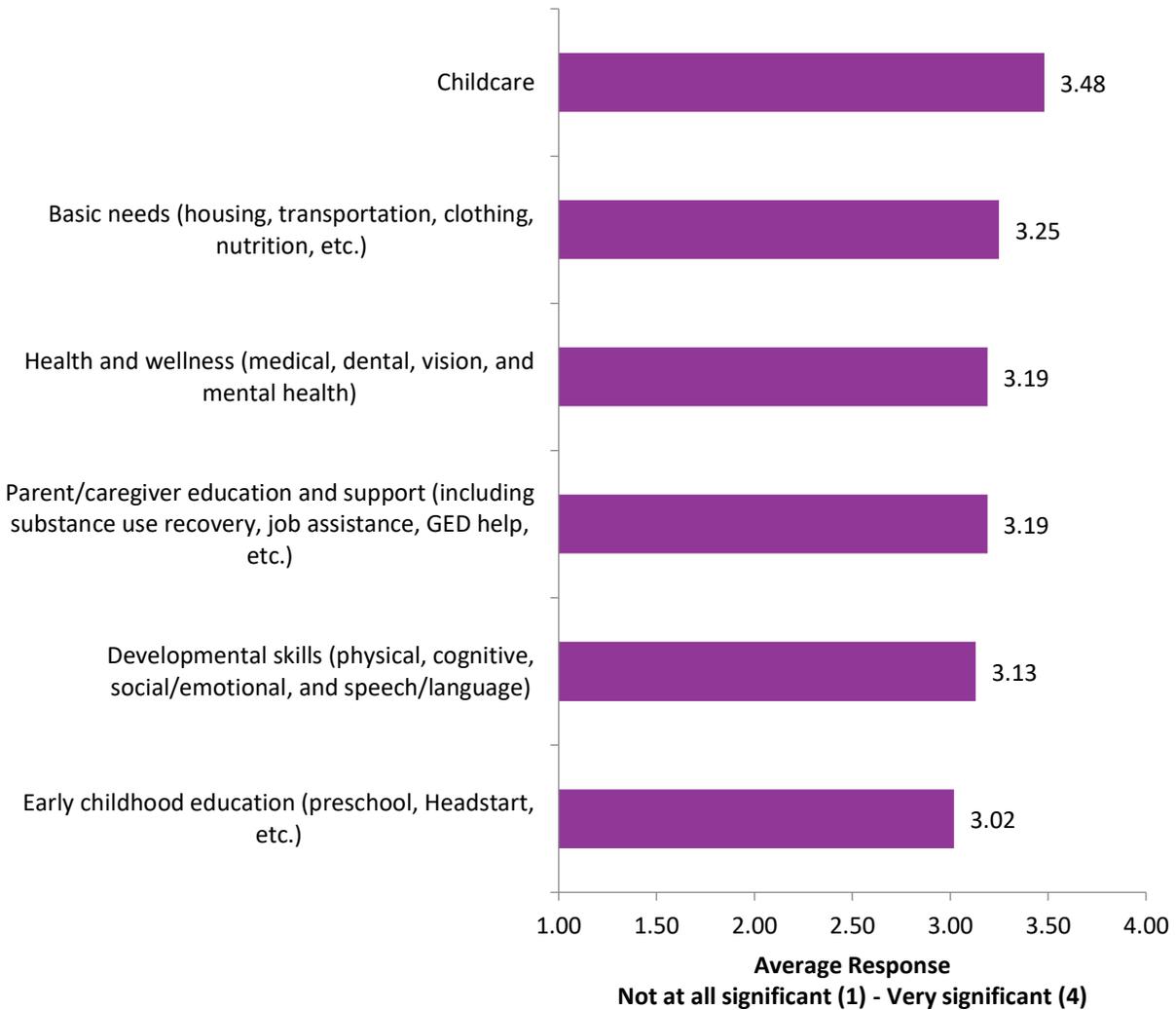
Please indicate the frequency with which families/caregivers need the following areas of support:



What barriers do families/caregivers you work with face when working to get children ready for kindergarten?

- Transportation; time, especially when working multiple jobs; money, both from the standpoint of poverty and being able to afford those things which might aid in kindergarten readiness
- Household barriers, such as changes in residence, homelessness, changes in household members; lack of nutrition; lack of sleep schedules; issues with technology and media
- Literacy issues, including limited parental education and lack of books; understanding the developmental needs of children academically, socially, and emotionally; lack of awareness of community programs and resources; limited access to quality, affordable childcare and other early childhood educational opportunities
- Limited access to parental education and play-based programs
- Mental health; trauma and domestic violence; addiction and substance abuse; stress; medical diagnoses
- Erratic responses to childhood misbehavior; no family support; parental apathy; discrimination

How significant are the barriers faced by parents/caregivers you work with in relation to the following categories?



What are three organizations your organization partners with the most?

Number of Respondents	Organizations
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northland Foundation
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duluth Public Schools
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Health and Human Services

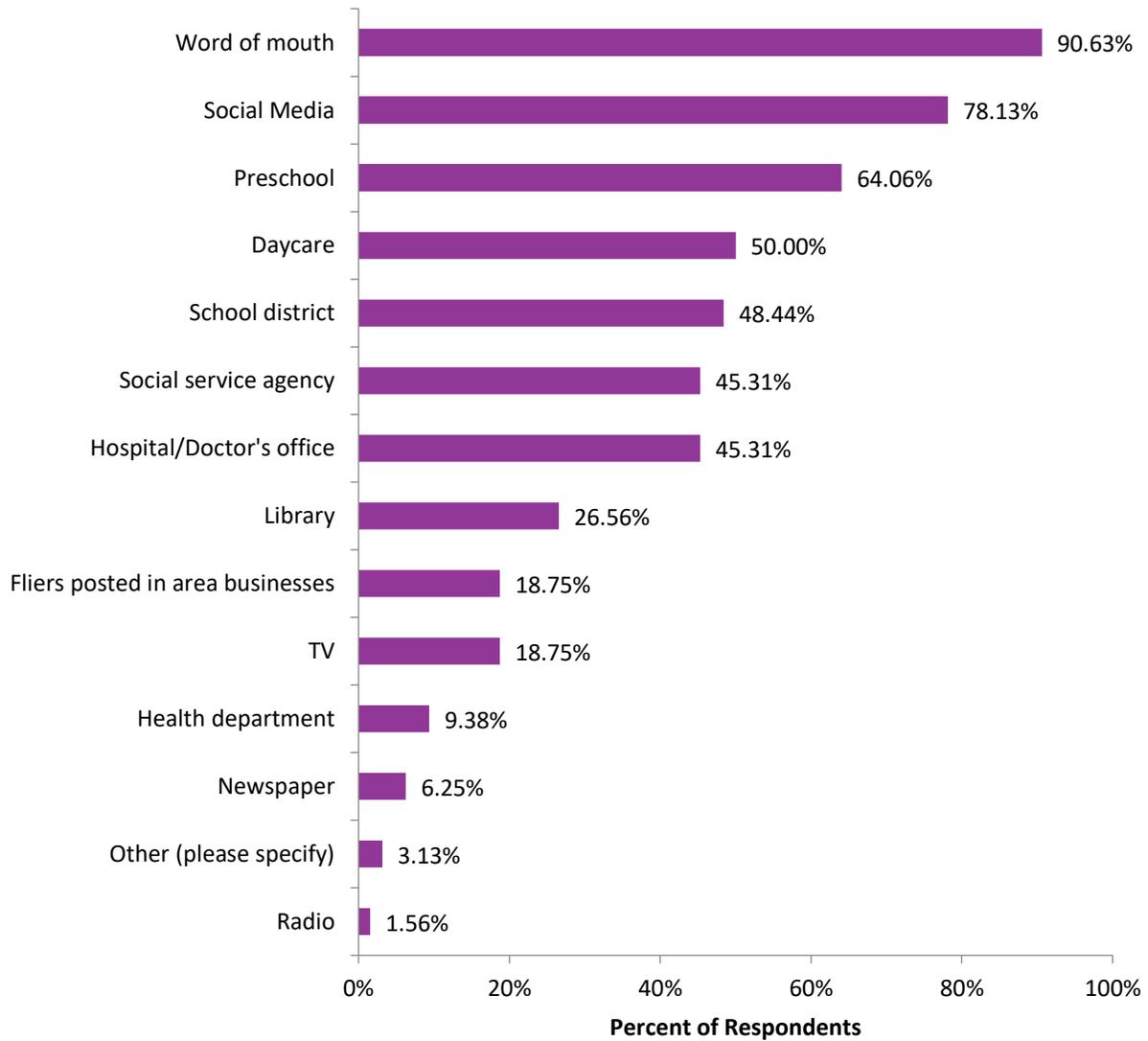
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Action Duluth • Duluth Head Start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Development Center • St. Louis County
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accend Services Inc. • Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help Me Grow
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency • Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) • Kids Closet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical professionals • University of Minnesota Duluth • Duluth Family YMCA
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) • Birth to Three • Center for Inclusive Childcare • Childcare Aware • Children’s Dental Services • CHUM • Damiano Center • Duluth Children’s Museum • Essentia Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative • Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault • St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services • Valley Youth Center • YWCA
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult & Teen Challenge • Boys and Girls Club Northland • Center for American Indian Resources (CAIR) • Chemical dependency providers • Child Care Assistance Program • Child care/education opportunities • Child Find • Clinical therapy • Community daycares • Community Dental Services • Community therapies (speech, OT, etc.) • Denfeld’s Girls Group • Duluth Community Garden Program • Duluth Community School Collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Witness Child Advocacy Center • Health Systems • Home care • Local pediatrician offices • Local preschools/daycares • Lutheran Social Services • Maurices • Men as Peacemakers • Mental Health Northwoods • Mental health providers • Mentor Duluth • Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors • MNSure • Neighborhood community organizations • Northwood Children’s Services • Outside medical facilities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duluth Heritage Sports Center • Duluth NAACP • Duluth Nature Play Collaborative • Duluth Partnership on Child Care Task Force • Duluth Police Department • Duluth Public Library (DPL) • Duluth Public Schools – Preschool • Duluth Public Schools – Special Services • Duluth Youth Agency Coalition • Early Childhood Screening • Families in Transition • First Children’s Finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Aware • Rotary Club • Safe Haven • Salvation Army • Second Harvest Food Bank • SOAR • Social Services/Mental Health Services/Therapy/Counseling • St. Louis Co. Foster Care • St. Louis Co. – referrals from Child Welfare • The Hills • United Way • White Earth Behavioral Health • WIC • Work Force
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What three organizations do you most often recommend to families/caregivers when they need school readiness support?	
Number of Respondents	Organizations
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help Me Grow
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head Start
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duluth Public Library (DPL)
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Screening
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duluth Preschool
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duluth Public Schools
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Special Education
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A – don’t do direct service

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth to Three • Doctors • Families in Transition • Mason Free Speech Clinic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health services • Parent Aware Child Care • School districts
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AEOA • AEOA Head Start • Career Solutions • Center for Inclusive Childcare • Child Care Aware • Child Care Aware-Parent Aware Quality Coaching • Child Find • Childcare opportunities • CHUM • Doctors • Duluth Family YMCA • Duluth Public Schools – Special Education • Early childhood programs • Early childhood/schools • Early Learning • Family Collaborative • Google • Home programs to build foundation skills • Human Service • Kids Closet • Lincoln Park Children & Families Collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Community (Pediatrician, Polinski, Masonic Children’s Clinic, etc.) • Northland Foundation • Other certain childcare facilities in the area • Other therapies (OT or SLP) • Parent Advisory Council • Pathways to Achievement • Public Health • Public Health Nursing/In Home Family Services (PHHS) • Schools/Preschool programs • Social Services • St. Louis County • St. Louis County Department of Children’s Mental Health • St. Louis County Social Services • St. Louis County Public Health Workers • Therapy services • UMD Robert F. Pierce Speech & Language Development • YWCA

Where do you think parents/caregivers go to get information about school readiness?
(Check all that apply.)



Other sources of information:

- Google
- ECFE

FINDINGS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A majority of respondents think that parents and caregivers are consulting unofficial sources (i.e., word of mouth, social media) for information on school readiness. ● Less than half of respondents think that parents and caregivers are consulting official sources (i.e., school district, social service agency, hospital/doctor’s office) for information on school readiness.
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Where do you receive professional development/training on school readiness issues?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The most frequently cited sources for professional development included Northland Foundation (including the THRIVE initiative), the school district, Parent and Child Care Aware, and continuing education courses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Other specific sources of professional development included Public Health and Human Services Conference, Minnesota Department of Education, National Association for the Education of Young Children, St. John’s Early Childhood Summit, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors, Natural Start Alliance, Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Achieve, Minnesota Tribal Early Childcare, Center for Inclusive Child Care, and the Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Other general sources of professional development included public health nurses, hospital speakers, research/professional journals, online, college courses, webinars, and conferences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A small number of respondents (N = 4) indicated that they do not receive professional development.

OVERALL SURVEY FINDINGS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respondents repeatedly noted that parents and caregivers that they work with lack awareness. They lack awareness regarding child development timelines and milestones; they lack awareness of the resources and programs available; and given the perception that parents and caregivers are consulting informal sources for information, they are likely unaware of the best sources to consult. ● Another recurring theme was the idea that basic needs are not being met in many households – food, clothing, shelter, safety. When children lack these basic necessities, it can delay their development. ● The sector working with children and families/caregivers with preschool aged children is broad and deep. Survey respondents noted over 90 organizations and services that they partner with to address kindergarten readiness. Creating a sector map will help visualize the web of partners with nodes and hubs to better move forward defining roles and potential leaders within the network. ● Finally, childcare is an issue on two levels. First, many parents/caregivers cannot afford safe, quality childcare. Second, there is a shortage of affordable, quality childcare providers in the area.
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Interviews

We conducted twelve interviews with people working in various roles within organizations supporting children and parents/caregivers. The interviews focused on three main areas:

1. Identify strengths (organizations, programs, or individuals) in the kindergarten readiness sector (broadly defined);
2. Determine common gaps and get input on how they might be addressed; and
3. Talk about how the sector might be brought together to leverage strengths and close gaps.

In addition, we asked interviewees to identify others working within the sector that we should include in the planning process for Every Child Ready Duluth (ECRD). While the sector survey touched on some of these areas, the conversations allowed for deeper exploration.

When discussing sector strengths, interviewees praised the many programs available for children and parents/caregivers in Duluth. Organizations and individuals are well connected and often refer parents/caregivers to needed resources within the sector. The school district also has a commitment to early childhood screenings and this process allows for identification of needs and referrals to the appropriate interventions. While it is state law for children to get screened before entering kindergarten (or within the first 30 days of enrollment), the reality is

that children are not getting consistently screened due to a variety of factors and families are not always following up on interventions recommended.

Common gaps discussed included:

- Transportation issues for low-income people in Duluth. Every interviewee identified transportation as a significant barrier for many low-income families with young children. In addition, there was consensus that the public transportation system doesn't adequately meet the needs of parents/caregivers, especially if a child has a preschool opportunity in the opposite direction of the home or workplace.
- There is a lack of childcare providers, spaces in quality preschool programs, and financial aid for those that qualify. The childcare shortage is especially critical for children with special needs.
- The increase in transient populations makes it difficult to track children to provide consistent services. Plus, being homeless or transient puts additional stress on parents/caregivers so they have less time/resources available to devote to kindergarten readiness.
- There is a lack of awareness of what programs are available and what children might qualify for. There's also limited spots in some programs that are essential for some children (like mental health services). Even when parents do know about programs, transportation and time constraints (especially for working parents) can keep them from participating.
- Parents/caregivers lack knowledge about developmental milestones, so they don't even realize that there may be a program that would help their child. Parent/caregiver education programs in the community are excellent, but there is a lack of awareness about these programs. Plus, it's much more complex to prepare students for school now than it was when parents/caregivers were children, so if they are relying solely on their own experiences/knowledge they may miss opportunities to better prepare their children for school.
- Racism is prevalent in the community and impacts how people of color interact with the systems in place to support children and parents/caregivers. In addition, programs are not always culturally-sensitive and lack awareness of how to integrate culture as a way to show respect and build trust.
- Many children experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Organizations working with children and parents/caregivers may not always be equipped to respond. The health and wellness of families is critical for education, workforce development, and overall quality of life.
- Businesses are just now recognizing the importance of their engagement in early childhood education and school readiness, so they have yet to assert any influence, but could be players in shaping potential solutions.

To address these gaps, some interviewees talked about how to bring people to the table to build grassroots solutions, rather than top-down solutions. Bringing people of color into the conversation in an honest and genuine way to learn and increase allyship is a way to address solutions collaboratively. Meeting people where they are is key.

The Northland Foundation has worked to increase the capacity of childcare providers through the Thrive Initiative and has frequent continuing education opportunities to help people develop skills. ECRD should work to not duplicate the efforts of the Thrive Network. The Northland Foundation's scholarships (along with financial aid available from the County for preschool for those that qualify) are also key to closing the preschool gap for many parents/caregivers.

Continuing to learn what is offered by the various organizations and programs in Duluth so people can give referrals will also help parents/caregivers connect to the resources they need to help their children. ECRD can think at a system level about how organizations and programs are connected and where there are opportunities to strengthen the system so it more effectively addresses needs.

In addition, thinking about how to address basic needs first will help ease parental/caregiver stress so they free up resources and time to focus on the needs of their children and can better support their education.

Finally, when addressing gaps, interviewees noted that partnering with other organizations is essential. This is a strength of organizations currently working with children and parents/caregivers and they should absolutely continue to bring creativity and resources to any issue the group seeks to tackle.

When considering how the kindergarten readiness sector could come together and include all programs and services that try to reach pre-k children and their parents/caregivers, many interviewees noted that while it's valuable to have networking opportunities to learn from other organizations and increase awareness, having a project with a common goal is compelling and motivating. Every interviewee said that building network capacity would be valuable and a great learning opportunity and agreed that ECRD is a worthwhile effort that they want to be a part of in some way. Using people's time wisely by having actionable goals and making incremental progress will increase buy-in and commitment. The library could take on the role of organizing the group (having dedicated staff is essential), clearly communicating to all stakeholders (starting with getting meetings on people's calendars many months in advance), and reporting on outputs and outcomes.

Interviewees:

- Katie Bakke, YWCA Spirit Valley Early Childcare Center
- Jodi Broadwell, Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative
- Sara Cole, President/CEO, Duluth Family YMCA
- Lynn Haglin, Northland Foundation
- Molly Harney, University of Minnesota – Duluth
- Rachel Jacob, ISD 709, Early Child Screening / Help Me Grow
- Jennifer Jaros, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
- Mayor Emily Larson, City of Duluth
- Jen Peterson, Child Care Aware of Minnesota Northeast
- Brittany Robb, Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center
- Katie Schmitz, Children’s Program Coordinator, American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO)
- Tonia Villegas, St. Louis County, Child Care Assistance

Sector Research

This section further explores the early childhood/school readiness sector in Duluth based on research done online using websites and reports gathered in early 2020. The Duluth early childhood sector is multi-faceted, with robust connections in certain places and opportunities for more coordination in others. Our goal in scanning the sector was not to be comprehensive, but to inventory and learn from the online presence and reports of organizations in the community to determine some initial implications for the ECRD program as it develops.

We know that this research is not comprehensive and that additional learning can be gained by connecting with childcare centers, in-home childcare businesses, and providers (public and private). These are areas of the sector often without a web presence, so one-on-one connections are needed to gain insights from those working in these areas.

Additional scanning of the healthcare sector is also needed. In the past, DPL has maintained a partnership with area medical facilities and ECRD desires early connections with expecting mothers and those caring for babies. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed making connections in the healthcare sector for purposes of this report, so next steps will make a concerted effort to add in these voices.

There is also a movement among local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to more intentionally raise awareness of and support early childhood programs. While somewhat removed from direct services to young people, local businesses ultimately benefit from an education system that produces an engaged community and workforce. Next steps will also include expanding to fold in voices from local business.

ISD 709 Programs

Early childhood programs for children in Duluth are offered by a variety of entities including the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program through the ISD 709, Duluth Head Start, YWCA Duluth’s Early Childhood Education Center, the YMCA Early Childhood Development Center, and the UMD Children’s Place. These organizations, along with [many private preschools](#), represent the community of early childhood families that DPL aims to serve through Every Child Ready Duluth (ECRD).

ISD 709 is the largest organization doing targeted early childhood work in Duluth. In 2019, they served 1,193 early childhood students through their [Birth to Age 5 Program](#) (ISD 709 2019 Annual Report). ISD 709’s early childhood programming includes early childhood screening, early childhood family education, early childhood special education, Duluth Preschool, Head Start, School Readiness, and a voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program.

An Early Childhood Leadership Team is now meeting, the group includes several ISD 709 program staff (Head Start, ECFE, ECSE (Early Childhood Special Education), community education), and representatives from ECRD. The Team will expand in the future to include other early childhood stakeholders and community representation.

ISD 709 Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

The ECFE ([Early Childhood Family Education](#)) program offers parent education classes, family events, and home visits. This program equips parents to be a key partner in the education of their child by using a research-based curriculum that ties in with developmental stages and encourages parental growth. The program has several components that tie in structure and free play to build social skills at the same time parents are making connections with each other.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The library and ECFE can partner to promote programs and services that benefit children and families. For example, the library can promote the parent education available through ECFE and also potentially collaborate on family programming. ECFE can promote library services to families in their programs.• ECFE could get parent feedback about ECRD to share with the library.• The library can consider being a site for early childhood screenings and promote other screening opportunities.
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ISD 709 2019 Annual Report

ISD 709 has specific goals and objectives related to early childhood. Page 3 of the ISD 709 2019 Annual Report lists two areas of focus pertinent to early childhood and community efforts:

- Early Childhood and Transition to Kindergarten
- Full Service Community Schools - a goal listed here states “Improve educational outcomes by connecting children and families with the academic, social and health services necessary to provide a more stable environment.”

Stats: While 1,193 children were served through all ISD 709 early childhood initiatives in 2019, the report states (p. 4) that 925 children ages birth to 4 and their families were involved in ECFE programs last year, through classes and home visits. Special events served 685 children, and 426 children were served by preschool classes.

Kindergarten Readiness percentages based on FAST earlyReading literacy assessment reported on page 7 show a decrease in readiness from 45.3% to 41.8%. The district is far from their indicated goal of 90% Kindergarten readiness by 2025, and the pattern of decrease is concerning. This is a strong argument in favor of an intensified and unified community effort to increase school readiness.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can ISD 709 help connect families with young children to DPL programming as an academic service provided in the community? ● How can Every Child Ready Duluth be present at district sites and events? ● How can we achieve alignment with all the organizations working on school readiness in Duluth? What role can the library play in coordinating the alignment and collaboration?
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Duluth Head Start 2016-2017 Community Assessment, with updates from 2019-2020 Assessment

The Duluth Head Start 2019-2020 Community Assessment provides a wealth of demographic data about the overall community. The 2018 poverty rate in Duluth was ~20%, disproportionately affecting children and elderly populations. In addition, 34% of Duluth’s population is considered as “working poor” and 14% of Duluth families receive public assistance (p. 1). Duluth has a distinct childcare shortage, and sources cited in the assessment indicate that only 55% of children under age 6 who need childcare are able to get a slot (p. 2). Homelessness is a growing concern, and Duluth Head Start served 24 students classified as homeless during the 2018 - 2019 school year (p. 7). Head Start’s work with the YWCA Childcare Center, the Families in Transition program, a Home Base teacher, and at least 2 more staff specifically dedicated to these families are all examples of ways Head Start is addressing the issue of homelessness.

In their 2016-2017 Community Assessment, Duluth Head Start addressed overall enrollment and parental involvement. Through federal funding, Duluth Head Start is able to provide preschool services to 239 children in a given school year. Through additional state funding, they previously provided Head Start services for 51 additional children via the YWCA Spirit Valley Childcare Center and home-based services for 12 additional children (p. 1). (The YWCA Early Childhood Education Center served a total of 74 children in 2016, as [per their website.](#))

Duluth Head Start’s 2016-2017 Assessment addresses the direct impact of parental involvement on early childhood development and later academic success. Through the PFCE (Parent, Family,

and Community Engagement) framework, Head Start intends to improve outcomes for children by increasing family involvement and improving community awareness and engagement (p. 20).

Duluth Head Start administered a mid-year parent survey in 2016-2017, and survey results are included as part of the Assessment. Even though these results are now three years old and include mostly qualitative results such as open-ended comments, the survey is a good sample of how parents interact with their children’s early schooling. The following are specific indicators of interest:

- 45 parents indicated that they participated in family nights
- 73 parents indicated that they participated in a home visits
- 81 parents indicated that they participated in a conference

These statistics all represent parent-school touchpoints where library programming information could be shared directly with parents.

Another factor to consider is the indicator that 52 parents responded that work schedule prohibited them from being more involved in Head Start activities.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Head Start initiatives that increase at-home early literacy activities for families are a perfect match for library programming and engagement. Head Start should be eager to partner around these initiatives.● Every Child Ready Duluth programming should bear in mind the need for a variety of times and locations to help working parents participate. Partnering with the schools to integrate library programming into ISD 709 and Head Start family nights, for instance, is one way to “meet parents where they are.”
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ISD 709 Local Literacy Plan - Reading Well by Grade 3

According to the ISD 709 Local Literacy Plan: “Reading Well by Grade 3,” the district reviewed and revised their Local Literacy Plan in 2019. The plan includes a Multi-tiered System of Support with core instruction based on the MN English Language Arts Standards and a balanced literacy framework for grades K-5. The Duluth Preschool uses [Opening the World of Learning \(OWL\)](#) early literacy curriculum and began implementing [Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment System](#) in fall 2019, a tool recommended by the [Minnesota Dept. of Education’s Kindergarten Entry Profile](#).

Page 14 of the ISD 709 plan refers to a community partnership with the [Northland Foundation](#) in respect to early childhood academic support.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DPL should support teachers and parents in supplementing the curriculum used through this program. How could Every Child Ready Duluth programming mirror or support this curriculum? ● Learn more about how the Northland Foundation is supporting ISD’s early childhood efforts and determine if there are possible connection points or add-on programs that Every Child Ready Duluth could offer. ● The ISD 709 plan lists many community partners; the library could easily be one of these partners. ● How are roles defined within the school readiness sector in Duluth? How can we communicate about what each organization brings to the table and align their work for deeper collaboration?
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Northland Foundation

The Northland Foundation is a publicly supported foundation serving seven counties in northeastern MN. Their KIDS PLUS program strives to “Improve the wellbeing of children and youth from birth to adulthood through diverse, community-centered initiatives”. Under the KIDS PLUS umbrella, the Northland Foundation operates an [Early Childhood Initiative](#) that operates through 12 coalitions in the region. Each coalition brings together community members and early education and care providers to provide vision, support, and action around early childhood needs in the community.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Northland Foundation and their coalition partnerships are natural partners in Every Child Ready Duluth. They are likely one of the best resources for filling in the network map. ● How can we coordinate the work in the school readiness sector so there is not duplication and overlap? Clearly defined roles and network coordination is something that library can consider as an opportunity.
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University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD)

UMD is home to Children’s Place through their College of Education and Human Service Professions Department. Children’s Place is a licensed childcare provider for 46 children ages 6 weeks to Kindergarten with infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms. Operating as a university lab school, the program functions to “serve the UMD community as an example of a quality program and as a resource for projects and questions concerning young children” ([Children’s Place Parent Handbook](#), p. 7).

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children’s Place staff and pre-service teachers are likely valuable resources for Every Child Ready Duluth. Children’s Place families could be provided with ECRD information and/or programming. ● The library can also collaborate with postsecondary early childhood education programs to work with pre-service teachers. By helping education students develop awareness of the library and other work in the sector, it increases the likelihood that this information could be utilized once education students are working in the sector.
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St. Louis County Health and Human Services

The St. Louis County Department of Health and Human Services is home to many wrap-around services for families. The [Follow Along Program \(FAP\)](#), one service specific to early childhood, helps identify children with potential developmental delays through parent contact and education. Concerns are referred for further evaluation through the [Help Me Grow](#) program. FAP also helps link families to community resources.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Every Child Ready Duluth information could be disseminated to parents and child care providers through various St. Louis County Health and Human Services programs including home visiting nurses, FAP, WIC, and child care licensing programs. ● The library could consider collaborating with county programs to provide direct programming to families and/or training for county staff interacting with families.
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American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO)

[AICHO](#) provides Native Americans with housing and community support services while promoting indigenous arts, cultural, and food justice programs in Duluth. AICHO programming focuses on indigenous values and seeks to promote stability among their community. Because this population experiences higher poverty rates, supporting families with young children is even more important.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The library recently worked with AICHO to feature indigenous youth artwork in the community art gallery. By virtue of their integrated work with indigenous populations, AICHO could be a strong partner in early literacy communication to Native American parents and families. Other outreach programming is also in place, like story times. ● AICHO could serve as a partner and advisor as ECRD seeks to build cultural representation and connections to culturally specific programs.
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The Arc Northland

[The Arc Northland](#) seeks to uphold rights and provides services for individuals with disabilities and their families. The organization advocates for community inclusion and supports for those with various disabilities as well as emotional and behavioral differences. Parent and family support groups are provided for those dealing with various behavioral and emotional differences. The Arc Northland invites community groups to share and exchange information with the disabilities community.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Including children with disabilities and their families in community ventures and events is very important. Every Child Ready Duluth information could be shared with parent/family support groups through The Arc Northland’s programs and/or Every Child Ready Duluth programming could be designed to meet their unique needs.
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CHUM Duluth

[CHUM](#) is an interfaith, nonprofit human services agency that works to deliver assistance to homeless and low-income populations. They operate an emergency shelter and food pantry as well as provide support services such as housing assistance, access to public benefits, and basic medical care. CHUM oversees the [Steve O’Neil Apartments](#) which provide housing for a diverse community of residents and families that have experienced long-term homelessness. In addition to housing, the Apartments provide services such as family coaching, parenting classes (Grow Up Group), infant and toddler programming and after-school programs.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The Steve O’Neil Apartments’ wrap-around programs for low-income residents provide a great opportunity for partnership with the library. Every Child Ready Duluth programming could be integrated on-site with both children and parents.● The library has an established relationship with the Apartments through regular literacy nights. In addition, many residents frequently utilize library services. How can ECRD connect SONA residents who frequent the library with resources and programming for their children that they might not be aware of?
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Minnesota Masonic Children’s Clinic for Communication Disorders

[The Masonic Children’s Clinic](#) provides services for children ages birth to 9 years who experience language delays or difficulties. They diagnose and treat a variety of communication disorders with the help of speech language pathologists and audiologists. In addition to assessment and treatment on site, the clinic provides off-site visits and parent workshops. Autism specific workshops and programs are also available.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In addition to being a great resource regarding early language acquisition and communication disorders of early childhood, the Masonic Children’s Clinic could be a great organization through which to reach parents and children who will greatly benefit from Every Child Ready Duluth programming and service including those on the Autism spectrum.
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Family Freedom Center

[The Family Freedom Center](#) is an organization that provides a place for Black community empowerment and resources. They seek to “engage, empower, and educate” through workshops, gatherings, and conversations. Their [Facebook page](#) provides more info on their programming and community work.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ECRD should engage with Family Freedom Center during the planning stages in order to have an established relationship to inform the design of the initiative. ● The Family Freedom Center could be a great partner and resource for sharing ECRD and library information with and providing input from the Black community. Family programming and services could compliment their workshops and offerings.
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Damiano Center

[The Damiano Center](#) operates a community soup kitchen, free store, clothing exchange, referrals and information for community support services, children’s programs, and health/addiction support groups.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Damiano Center could be a good information sharing location for Every Child Ready Duluth services.
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Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Duluth

[LISC Duluth](#) is a local branch of a national community development organization. As a [nonprofit CDFI](#), they support collaboration between local government, businesses, and community leadership for the betterment of the community. Combining philanthropic, corporate, and government funds, LISC invests in opportunities to strengthen neighborhoods, businesses, and families in low-income communities. Working directly in [Hillside](#) and [Lincoln Park](#) neighborhoods, [LISC promotes quality of life initiatives](#) and works with the City of Duluth on visioning and planning toward the future.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LISC could be instrumental in networking and messaging around Every Child Ready Duluth, particularly in Hillside and Lincoln Park. Here is their 2019 Annual Report.
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Bridging Health North

[Bridging Health](#) provides up-to-date data and web-based tools to help the community understand and communicate health indicators and needs across a variety of sectors. Current partners in Bridging Health include Essentia Health, St. Louis County Health Department, Generations Healthcare Initiatives, NAACP Duluth, and others. The site includes a variety of topic areas that can be searched for representative data and resources including (among other topics) Education, Economy, and Social Environment. The site also includes Community Health Dashboards by county and [demographics data](#) that can be parsed by zip code, neighborhood, and county. Much of the site's data is presented through the lens of health outcomes and access to health services. Finally, they provide several resource lists including "promising practices" highlighting community health programs and policies from around the country.

Library Implications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● ECRD can use demographics data for decision-making and follow health outcomes to make program adjustments as needed.
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Models from Other Libraries

In this section, we looked at several models from around the country of early childhood education and kindergarten readiness programs that offered some insight into how ECRD might structure its programs. Many communities have holistic, early childhood education and literacy programs, with the below examples representing programs that offered relevant learning for ECRD.

Besides considering these models, DPL staff and others involved in the ECRD initiative will need ongoing training and support to effectively implement the ECRD strategic plan at the leadership-level. Resources like the Arrowhead Library System's programs supporting early literacy in member libraries and youth services staff are key to capacity building for the sector-building side of the ECRD initiative. Other local, state, and national groups offer training for staff working in school readiness projects to effectively plan, implement, and evaluate these efforts. As the ECRD strategic plan develops, stakeholders should be conscious of the various levels of capacity building needed to ensure the success of the initiative.

School Library Journal explored the role of public libraries working in community early childhood initiatives in [Perfect Partners: Libraries and the Nationwide Pre-K Movement](#) (Jacobson, 2015). This piece highlights the Queens Public Library which opened a full-fledged preschool classroom in 2014. Today, the [Queens Public Library Early Childhood Programs](#) include a variety of storytime and Kindergarten readiness programs as well as their [Universal Pre-K program](#). While most libraries aren't ready to dive into administering daily preschool classes, Jacobson asserts that Queens is an example of public libraries rising to meet the distinct needs of their communities. Libraries are extending their early childhood services beyond storytime to meet the needs of parents, families, and early childhood educators in a variety of ways both in-house and in the communities they serve.

San Jose (CA) PL (service population 1.058 million)

The SJPL hosts a [Library and Early Education Commission](#) that involves commission members from the community, some with early childhood backgrounds, to inform library decisions and make recommendations around early childhood programming and services. The Commission works directly with the City Council and also provides a forum for discussion and public input.

The SJPL website [lists many programs and services](#) for children and families with an emphasis on early literacy programs, take home materials, and online resources for parents. They also partner with [FIRST 5 of Santa Clara County](#) to provide developmental screenings after storytimes.

Skokie, Evanston, and Morton Grove IL (combined service population ~155,000)

The Evanston, Skokie, and Morton Grove early childhood communities and school districts came together with the [Infant Welfare Society of Evanston](#) in 2016 to form an [Early Childhood Alliance](#). The public libraries in these communities are partners in this multi-community effort.

[Skokie PL](#), [Morton Grove PL](#), and [Evanston PL](#) each have their own early literacy programming and services and all three are co-hosts of [Lifting Up Early Childhood community programming](#) led by the Evanston Community Foundation and [Evanston Cradle to Career](#). More than 50 other organizations including the Villages and Cities that are participating and their school districts are listed as co-hosts. Community events include film viewing ([No Small Matter](#)), speakers, and community discussion. These gatherings are not necessarily about library specific programming or early literacy but focused more on the comprehensive need for early childhood education and services in the community.

The three communities, their school districts, libraries, and dozens of other organizations are involved in this initiative.

Multnomah County (OR) Library (service population 807,555)

[Multnomah County Library's Every Child Initiative](#) is a library-centric endeavor that focuses on library resources and programming as the center of their early childhood work in the community. While supporting parents and caregivers through [education and programming](#), Multnomah also provides services for [early childhood educators](#) and partners with Head Start and other local early childhood organizations to offer classes and resources. An extension of these services, Multnomah works with the local school districts to provide [Early Kindergarten Transition sessions](#) in the summer as a way to prepare Head Start students and students who haven't had preschool experiences prior to Kindergarten in the fall.

New York Public Library Early Literacy

The [NYPL Early Literacy](#) efforts include online resources for parents such as audio downloads through the [NYPL Sings program](#). A downloadable book (in side-by-side English and Spanish, growth chart, literacy tip sheet, and other resources are also available on their website (with French, Bengali, and Chinese available for some resources). NYPL offers in-person early literacy

programming like storytimes and family literacy workshops at dozens of locations.

Literacy Inc.

[LINC \(Literacy Inc.\)](#) in NYC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving literacy rates amongst children in poverty. Through family, school, and community programs, LINC builds a “scaffold of support” to address children’s needs and parents’ understanding of literacy skills. Parent Workshops and Family Academies both serve to educate parents around literacy. One LINC initiative with the NYC Council, [City’s First Readers](#), works to empower parents and offer increased literacy tools and opportunities in at-risk neighborhoods. City’s First Readers includes partnerships with NYPL, Brooklyn PL, Queens Library, several literacy-based nonprofits such as Jumpstart, and community organizations such as the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development.

Family Place Libraries

[Family Place Libraries](#) is a replicable library model with Parent-Child workshops as an integral component. The initiative seeks to expand a public library’s role in early childhood development and lifelong learning that begins at birth. [Core Components](#) of a Family Place Library include *Trained Staff* who have completed Family Place Libraries training, *Parent Child Workshops*, *Special Collections* that go beyond books, *Specially Designed Spaces* that provide for interactive play and learning, *Collaborations and Partnerships* with community resources, *Outreach* with families, and *Additional Programming for Babies and Toddlers* that focuses on early child development.

The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County (service population ~230,000)

[The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County](#) provides library resources around early childhood education and development through the lens of Every Child Ready to Read and the Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards: [Language and Literacy Crosswalk Skill Comparison](#). They also provide examples of their Kindergarten Readiness Stations and Implementation Guides for various [early learning domains](#). PLYMC participates in 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and provides other [Kindergarten Readiness](#) resources such as early learning backpacks. The PLYMC website also provides patrons with access to the [Day By Day Ohio Family Literacy Calendar](#), an initiative of IMLS, the State Library of Ohio, and Ohio Ready to Read.

Achievement Gap Initiative

[The Basics](#) is an early childhood learning model developed with the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University that focuses on simple, everyday activities for parents and caregivers of small children. [The Five Basics](#) are: Maximize Love and Manage Stress; Talk, Sing and Point;

Count, Group and Compare; Explore Through Movement and Play; and Read and Discuss Stories. The Basics website provides video, print, and online resources that can be used with communities to begin speaking about early childhood development with the same, simple language. Implementation guides, handouts, plans, reading lists, posters, and skill building activities are available for download. Local “Basics” campaigns now exist in multiple communities such as [Chattanooga, TN](#).

Further Exploration

It’s clear that there are many directions the Every Child Ready Duluth (ECRD) initiative could take when structuring a plan for the next three years. Gathering additional input in next steps will help narrow those options by identifying where momentum exists within the kindergarten readiness sector. Several areas stand out for further conversation:

- Raising awareness of what organizations currently offer
- Increasing parent/caregiver knowledge of early learning milestones
- Raising awareness in our community of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children and adults
- Supporting parents/caregivers as their child’s first teacher and equipping them to build good habits around education
- Looking at the system of kindergarten readiness in the community (holistically) and identifying key gaps that need immediate attention
- Building collaboration/partnerships for organizations working with children and parents/caregivers
- Creating broad support in the community and with businesses beyond those organizations working with children
- Supporting childcare providers and their roles in the community
- Considering how to integrate culture into programs
- Expand input to include more aspects of the sector, like businesses, healthcare, and home/family childcare providers
- The impact of COVID-19 on families, especially those without regular Internet access

While our research identified these potential areas for discussion, it is also imperative that next steps allow space for topics to surface from sector stakeholders. In addition, while next steps will help structure an initial strategic plan, comprehensive sector input will be difficult given the COVID-19 situation and we will need to be intentional about seeking feedback from populations we wish to reach through ECRD.