



**Saint Paul**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# Envision SPPS: Early Childhood Education Workgroup

*Report on findings | September 2021*

## **I. EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKGROUP MEMBER NAMES, ROLES AND/OR TITLES, ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

1. Dr. Lori Erickson, Office of Early Learning Assistant Director (LEAD)
2. Chee Moua, Early Childhood Screening Program Manager
3. Brenda Natala, Interim Executive Director of Specialized Services
4. Dr. Monica Potter, Early Childhood Family Education Supervisor
5. Dr. Aric Jensen, Fraser Senior Director of Mental Health
6. Nicolee Mensing, Senior Director Head Start and Early Head Start
7. Dr. June Reineke, Minnesota Department of Education Specialist, Early Learning Services
8. Katy Smith, MNAFEE Board Chair and Early Childhood Advocate

## **II. MEETING DATES AND TIMES**

March 4, 2021 - 1:00-3:00 pm

March 18, 2021 - 1:00-3:00 pm

April 1, 2021 - 1:00-3:00 pm

April 15, 2021 - 1:00-3:00 pm

## **III. WORKGROUP PURPOSE STATEMENT**

Determine and illustrate how underutilized SPPS elementary schools can be leveraged to create Early Childhood Education hubs encompassing Pre-K, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and other early childhood resources to support early learners and their families in centralized locations.

## **IV. ESSENTIAL FINDINGS**

The Saint Paul Public Schools is committed to early childhood programming. For this report, early childhood programming is considered a birth to kindergarten entry continuum of services. Programming will include ECFE, ECSE, Early Childhood Screening (ECS), and Pre-K programming under a hub model.



Based on feedback from the Envision Workgroup, the early childhood hub model will provide the most efficient model for early learners and their families. The early childhood hub model will offer “one stop” shopping that will provide community and district support to the residents of Saint Paul. The early childhood hub model will also serve as a marketing strategy for the Saint Paul Public schools. From a warm welcome at birth that continues through the transition to Kindergarten, families will be part of a community that educates and supports them as they begin their journey with Saint Paul Public Schools.

In conjunction with Council Member Noecker’s 3K initiative, statewide commitment to early childhood, and the impending nationwide movement to Universal Pre-K, it is incumbent for the Saint Paul Public Schools to align with this movement.

Based upon an analysis supported by state statute, early childhood expert guidance, current SPPS building/classroom square footage, the [Early Childhood report](#), and recommendations from the [Minnesota Department of Education](#) regarding facilities guidelines, it has been determined that the unique needs of early learners are best served in a building that has been specifically designed for children under the age of 5.

## **PROGRESSION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING IN SPPS**

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION**

The Saint Paul Public Schools ECFE program has a history dating back to the 1970s as a state pilot site for family education. The ECFE program exists to provide families education that strengthens their understanding of child growth and development. ECFE programming may be a family’s very first entry into the district. Per state statute, ECFE programs should prioritize programming and services for families and parents identified in the community needs assessment, particularly those families and parents with children with the most risk factors from birth to age three. To date, ECFE serves approximately 1,200 families per year. Course offerings range from family literacy, language and community-specific, three year old preparation for Pre-K, and parenting across generations.

Due to state and district funding fluctuations, ECFE has had programming at as many as 17 sites across the district and community. To date, ECFE programming is housed at 10 locations across the Saint Paul Public Schools. Within the past 20 years, the ECFE program has been moved 27 times.

It is important to note that in recent years, public housing entities ended an agreement with Community Education, allowing ECFE to use space at their locations free of charge. Due to this, the Saint Paul Public Schools moved all ECFE programs into district buildings. Since that time, ECFE has struggled to form an identity within a school community due



to the changing facilities needs of the elementary school buildings where programs have been located. For example, ECFE programming was moved out of the Homecroft building to support the relocation of JieMing Mandarin Immersion School.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD SCREENING**

The Saint Paul Public Schools ECS program helps families see how their child is developing before they enter formal schooling. Per state law, all Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students must complete early childhood screening within 90 days of school entry.

ECS has a long history within the Saint Paul Public Schools. Before Pre-Kindergarten programming, ECS supported kindergarten-aged learners. ECS was held in community locations (such as church basements) and elementary school gyms. It is important to note that the community locations were viewed as community service and were free of charge. The ECS staff had an office location at 1001 Johnson Parkway. ECS appointments were not offered to families at the Johnson Parkway location. At this time, ECS was generally 2-3 days per week with 3.5 hour days.

With the dramatic increase of school-based Pre-Kindergarten programming and desire to have onsite supports for families, ECS staffing moved into the Student Placement Center at 2102 University Avenue. At this time, ECS staff were located in the Student Placement Center building and offered onsite appointments to families. These services continue to this day and are available five days per week, eight-hour a day.

In addition to the ECS location at the Student Placement Center, the screening team had space at the Rondo complex at 560 Concordia Avenue. ECS staff was onsite two days per week, offering appointments for families. It is important to note that ECS was in the same location as the ECSE evaluation team. Both ECS and ECSE staff reported ease in connecting families to services and staff who could answer developmental questions from families. The ECS Rondo location no longer exists. Due to additional funding for early childhood programming, five Pre-K classrooms took over the Rondo ECFE programming space. The ECFE program then took over the ECS space.

With the closure of Rondo, ECS was able to move into available space at Harding High School at 1540 East 6th Street. The Harding High School space became available after the closure of the child care center, which was located in the complex. To date, onsite appointments are held for families.

At this time, ECS continues to offer community-based screening services. The services, however, are targeted. For example, ECS partners with the Office of Early Learning Early Care and Education partner sites for onsite appointments.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION**

### **Home and Community Programs**



ECSE services for approximately 800 children ages Birth to 5 are provided in home and community settings, including ECFE, Head Start, and early care and education centers. Approximately 100 staff provide these services. When the ECSE 3-5 Inclusion program started, it was located at 1780 W. 7th until 2011, when it was moved to 1919 University Avenue. The Birth to Three and 3-5 Inclusion programs were divided into East and West teams and located at Rondo and the vacant Humboldt Junior High. In March 2015, in preparation for the construction of Open World Learning, both east and west teams were moved to 271 Belvidere along with West Side ECFE and Head Start from Baker Center, and teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Visually Impaired from 1930 Como. Family group programs are held at Rondo or Wheelock to offer a central location for families in shared ECFE space.

The ECSE Evaluation Team is often the first contact families have with SPPS and processes over 1000 referrals per year. Families are invited to appointments in district testing/observation rooms, or staff conduct evaluations in homes and childcare centers. The team was first located at 360 Colborne and then leased space at Lifetrack Services on University Avenue. When the lease ended, the team was moved across University Avenue to the former Badger Bar. In the mid-2000s, the team was moved briefly to Crossroads, then to 1780 W. 7th, where they stayed for over ten years. The space was remodeled to include testing and observation rooms. In 2015, the team was moved to the Rondo complex, where they are still located.

The ECSE evaluation team works closely with Early Childhood Screening, which is located at the Student Placement Center. The impact of locating screening and evaluation in separate locations is confusion for families and a lag between appointments, resulting in delayed evaluation and services.

### **ECSE Classrooms**

In the 1970s and '80s, Saint Paul invested in state-of-the-art facilities for special education programs separate from general education programs. Programs at Tilden, Lindsey (current location of Children's and United Hospitals), and Jefferson were merged into an addition at Como Elementary and the new Bridgeview School. ECSE classrooms were located in the lower level of Como Elementary from 1976 until moving to a newly remodeled Rondo ECSE space in 1991. ECSE programs for 3-5 year olds were also located in separate sites at Wheelock, John A Johnson, JJ Hill, Highwood Hills, and Crossroads through 2013. Programming was not integrated with the Pre-K calendar, curriculum, scheduling, or transportation and was offered two to four days per week.

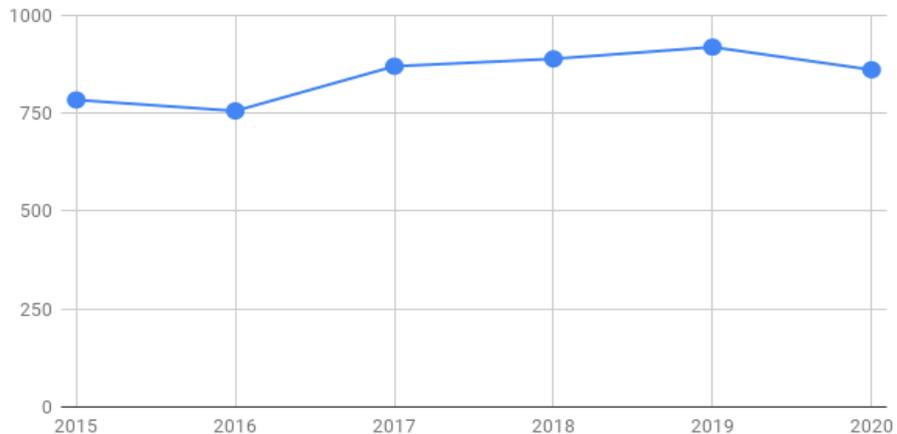
Collaborative, inclusive classrooms were offered on a small scale. In 2002, a Pre-K classroom opened at Wheelock in collaboration with ECFE, and in 2004, a co-taught Pre-K/ECSE class opened at Wheelock. Three additional co-taught classrooms opened at John A Johnson, Crossroads, and Maxfield for several years and closed when staff changed roles. Two days per week, classrooms for speech groups were offered at JJ Hill and Expo for more than ten years. In 2007, the Wheelock ECSE classrooms moved to American Indian/World Cultures Magnet to be aligned with elementary.



In 2013, the district moved all ECSE classrooms from multiple ECSE classrooms at separate sites to singleton classrooms in elementary schools in each area, supervised by elementary principals. Classrooms were aligned with the Pre-K curriculum and calendar, five-day per week programming, and building transportation. From 2014 through 2020, half-day co-taught Pre-K/ECSE classrooms were located in each attendance area. With the transition to full-day Pre-K, ECSE inclusive supports were allocated evenly across buildings, with three ECSE slots held in each classroom. In 2020-2021, full-day ECSE classrooms for 4-year-olds opened in each area, co-located with Pre-K and half-day ECSE classrooms for 3 and 4-year-olds when possible. Half of the full-day ECSE classrooms are located in schools with elementary ASD/DCD specialized programs. 30% of schools with ECSE classrooms have half-day, full-day, and specialized elementary programs. The impact on students and families is frequent transitions from age 3 to Kindergarten.

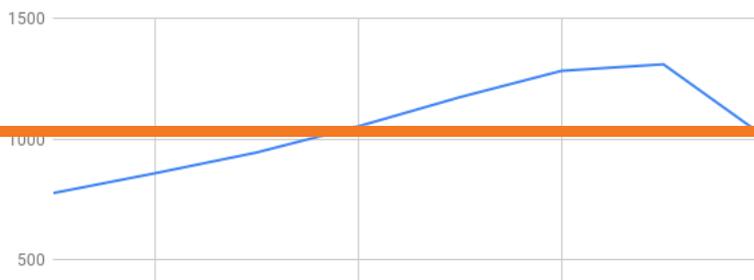
ECSE enrollment has shown steady growth after statewide Help Me Grow launched and increased funding for early learning programs created more access for children to be screened and identified for early intervention. Statewide, ECSE enrollment dropped by 20% during the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment is expected to return to pre-pandemic trends of steady annual increases due to expanding access to early learning programs.

### ECSE October 1 Enrollment



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, referrals to Help Me Grow dropped by 16.2% statewide in the 2020-2021 school year. In 2021, SPPS referral rates have rebounded to nearly pre-pandemic rates and are expected to continue to rise as in-person home, community, and classroom services resume.

### Referrals to Birth to Three





## **PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM**

In 2005, Project Early Kindergarten (PEK) started with ten half-day Pre-Kindergarten classrooms across the Saint Paul Public Schools, six Childcare Centers, and 11 Family Providers. In 2006, Early Reading First funding supported two additional half-day SPPS classrooms and two Childcare Centers. During this time, ECSE programming was not aligned to Pre-K programming.

In 2008, PEK and PEK-Early Reading First merged with School Readiness and Community Kindergarten to officially become the Pre-Kindergarten Program. During this time, the Saint Paul Public Schools offered four-year-old half-day Pre-Kindergarten programming. Within this model, the Saint Paul Public Schools supported childcare classrooms with three and four-year-old children.

In 2012, the Pre-Kindergarten program officially became The Office of Early Learning. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the Saint Paul Schools began offering Full Day Pre-Kindergarten programming. Each year after, the district has slowly converted all classrooms to full-day offerings. During the 2021-2022 school year, all Pre-Kindergarten classrooms will offer full-day programming.

Over the last 13 years, through the addition of state funding, the Pre-Kindergarten program has moved from 10 half-day classrooms to 59 full-day offerings across the district. (NOTE: This does not include Montessori programming.) Additionally, SPPS has experienced increased ECSE enrollment, requiring options for open enrollment, and has shifted ECSE service delivery to be more inclusive by reserving three ECSE seats in every Pre-K classroom. This growth has created a need for additional classroom space that has become an obstacle in creating warm, welcoming classrooms for children and families as partners such as Discovery Club or Early Childhood Family Education are forced out.

Decisions to move partners to create room for Pre-K is part of a prioritized building usage guidance from the Saint Paul Public Schools Facilities Department that offers recommendations for assigning spaces within school buildings. The guidance recommends assigning spaces in the following order, 1.) General Education, 2.) Special Education/ECSE, 3.) Pre-Kindergarten, 4.) Community Education and Fee-based Programs.

## **IMPACT STATEMENT**

Based on district history, early learning programming has moved locations multiple times due to prioritized building usage. The impact of location change leads to confusion and multiple transitions for families, program inefficiency, and affects overall program quality and identity.

With the anticipated emergence of Universal Pre-K, increased local, state, and federal funding for early learning, and increases in early childhood special education enrollment,



the Early Childhood Envision workgroup recommends centralizing early learning programs into a hub model.

Centralizing early learning programs provides opportunities for partnerships and collaboration that are not possible as programs currently exist. A full continuum of family support (ECS, ECFE, ECSE, Pre-K) can be offered in one location, reducing transitions and streamlining access to high-quality programming. Some of the benefits of a centralized location include:

- Multiple classrooms in a site which increases efficiency in operations, scheduling, collaboration, professional development
- Grouping of students in optimal classes
- Flexibility in transportation zones.
- Flexible staffing, guest teachers, professional development, and access to school social work support
- Access to early childhood screening
- Access to parent education supports and services.

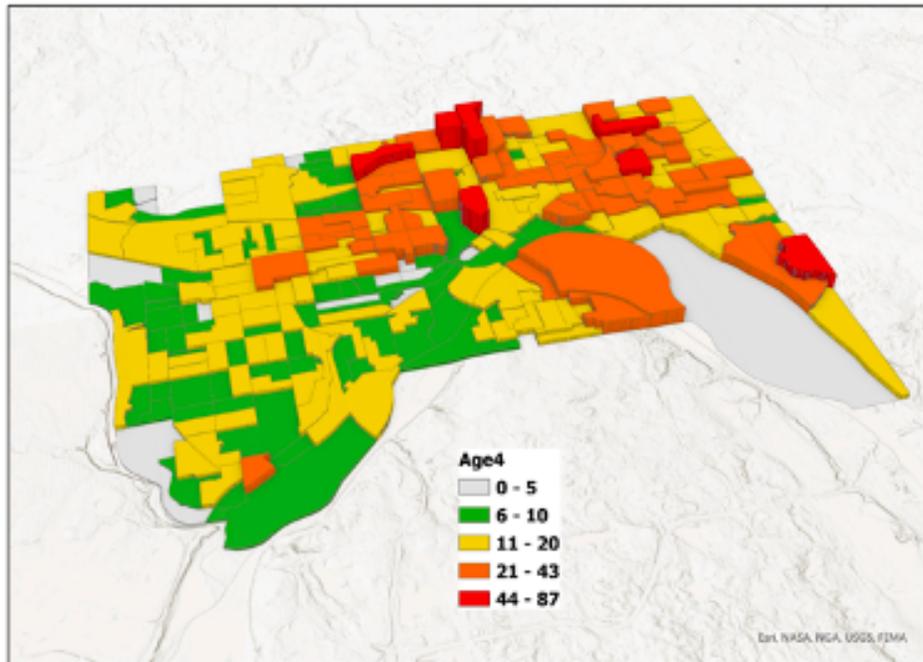
In addition to programming for students and families, a centralized location for early childhood staff is critical. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that ECS, ECSE Evaluation, and ECSE itinerant staff be housed in the hub locations to streamline supports for families and create system-wide staffing efficiencies.

## **BUILDING THE CASE FOR EARLY LEARNING HUBS**

When considering the investment in early childhood programming, it is important to understand the density and location of children.

From the [Early Childhood report](#): *The following 3D map (Figure 1) of Census Block Groups displays the relative distribution of 4,174 four-year-old children who live in Saint Paul. Since the size of a census block group boundary has little correlation with the density or number of four-year-old children in the area, the reader should attend to the differences in color (red highest density) and height of the bin (blocks) to see the emerging patterns of where four-year-old children are concentrated.*

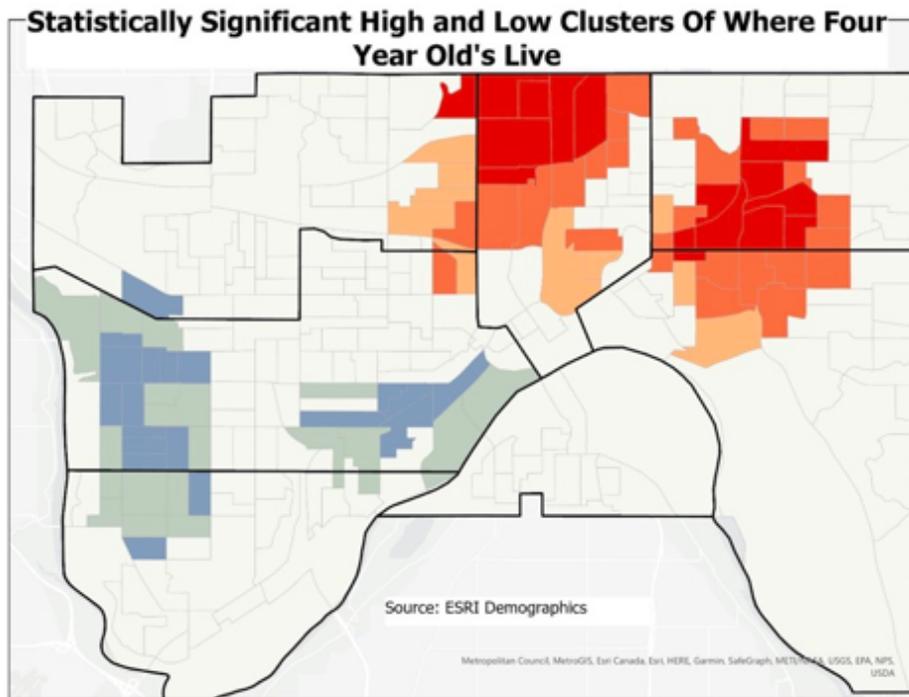
## Where Do Four Year Old Children Live in St Paul By Census Block Group?



Source: ESRI Demographics

Figure 1

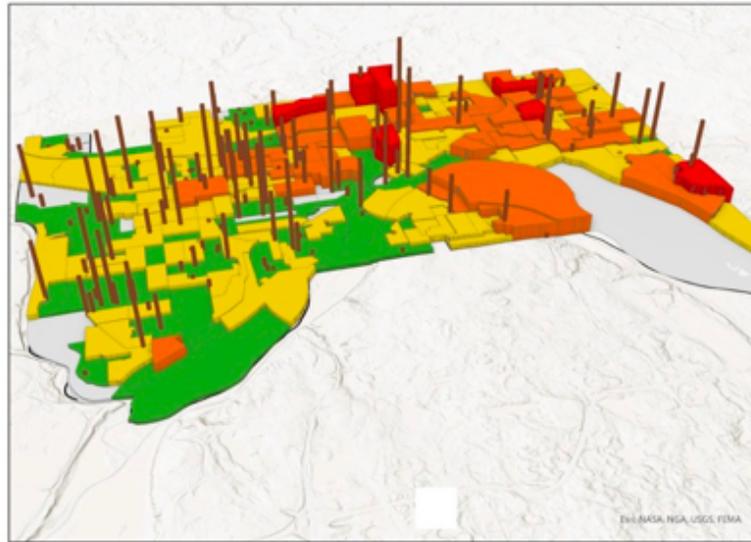
In addition, the map below (Figure 2) illustrates high (red) versus low (blue) concentrations of four-year-old children living in the city of Saint Paul. The map shows a density of children living in the northeast and north-central portion with smaller densities in west and south-central St Paul.



**Figure 2**

Furthermore, when considering the concentration of children in Saint Paul, one must also factor in the location of [Parent Aware](#) rated childcare programming. The map (Figure 3) below reveals the availability of childcare programming and the capacity (the height of the brown columns) of each site. When examining the map below, it is clear that there is a density of high-quality childcare programming with a low concentration of children in the northwest and southwest portions of the city. Based upon this data, the Saint Paul Schools should consider prioritizing early learning hub locations in the north and east portion of the city due to a significant number of children and families in an area where sufficient high-quality programming is less available.

### Where Are Large and Small Childcare Centers Concentrated (Spring 2021)



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services; ESRI Demographics

Figure 3

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING HUBS

Using the data from figures 1-3, unique enrollment pathway and facility investment information, the Early Childhood Envision group recommends the following:

**Early Childhood Continuum of services would remain at schools with Language Immersion, Montessori, Year-Round programs, and recent facility investments.**

These sites include Adams Spanish Immersion(1), American Indian Magnet (2), Cherokee Heights Montessori (4), Crossroads Science and Montessori (7), Frost Lake (3), Global Arts (3), Highland Park Elementary (3), JJ Hill Montessori (7), Jackson Elementary (2), L’Etoile du Nord (2), Nokomis North Montessori (6), Nokomis South Montessori (4), Phalen Lake Hmong Studies (2), Riverview West Side School of Excellence (2), Wellstone Elementary (3).

**The remaining Pre-K and ECSE programs would relocate to the early childhood hub model to offer a full continuum of birth to kindergarten entry opportunities.**

Impacted sites include: Battle Creek (3), Benjamin E. Mays (4), Bruce Vento (5), Como Park (4), Dayton’s Bluff (3), Eastern Heights (2), EXPO (1), Farnsworth (1), Four Seasons (3), Galtier (2), Groveland (1), Hamline (2), Hazel Park (1), The Heights (4), Highwood Hills (1), JA Johnson (3), Maxfield (2), Mississippi (2), Obama (2), Pre-K@Rondo (4), Saint Paul Music Academy (2).



When considering the decision to move to district-level early learning centers, one must keep in mind factors such as enrollment boundaries and pathways and the transition to kindergarten.

### **FACILITIES FEATURES FOR AN EARLY LEARNING HUB**

Based on feedback from the Early Childhood Workgroup participants, an early childhood hub should include classrooms with bathrooms, sinks, storage areas, large motor areas, sensory rooms, fenced playgrounds with age-appropriate equipment, libraries, and evaluation spaces, and collaboration spaces for staff.

As supported by the *Minnesota Department of Education Guide for Planning School Construction Projects (page 81)*:

*School districts often provide spaces for early childhood programs such as early childhood family education, head start, school readiness, family literacy/even start, school age care, child care, and community preschools, frequently in elementary schools. Heightened awareness of infant brain research is impacting school facilities planning by increasing parental demand for infant development programs and early parent education. Families often prefer schools as a location for family resource centers and interagency services that better meet the needs of children and their families. Essential elements to consider for early childhood program spaces include:*

*(1) Square footage: 1,000-1,400 square feet, including bathroom(s) and clothing storage areas, for 15-25 children. Provide additional spaces for cribs, eating, auxiliary play or other non-play areas, and indoor and outdoor large-muscle activities. A room to accommodate 12 to 18 adults for parent education and support activities is especially important for programs that involve both parents and young children.*

*(2) Location: First floor, convenient to outdoor exit and play areas, and bus/parent drop-off and pick-up zones. Classrooms should contain or be readily accessible to space for clothing storage, age-appropriate bathroom(s), a hand washing area, and a drinking fountain. Consider clustering early childhood classrooms with common spaces for student activities, teacher planning, and parent volunteers. Providing conference rooms for consultants to work with individual children allows community services to follow the children rather than having to move children from place to place throughout the community.*

*(3) Learning activities: Large group activity, parent-child interaction, dramatic play, block and construction, crafts and creative arts, cognitive and manipulative experiences, music, science, reading, and large muscle active play. Provide a separate, safe area for infant and toddler-specific interest areas. Consider sharing spaces for large muscle activities and workrooms among early childhood programs, and providing dedicated spaces for the safety of children of different ages, and to ease scheduling complications.*



*(4) Learning aids, equipment, technology: Age-appropriate toys, portable tables and stackable chairs, portable equipment with wheels, adjustable shelving and bookcases, easels, counter workspace, a sink with hot and cold running water, a carpeted storytelling/ reading area, an overhead projector and screen, electronic interactive white board capability, ceiling or wall-hung video monitors, and the ability to easily darken the room. Provide adequate display/bulletin board, AC power, and voice, video, and computer connections with high-speed Internet access. Plan work and play stations for students with disabilities.*

*(5) Storage, other needs: Provide storage spaces for food preparation equipment and eating facilities, diapering, and supplies, toys and equipment, including large muscle equipment. Provide workspace(s) for teachers to prepare and store teaching materials and access a phone, computer with high-speed Internet access, printer, and copy machine.*

### **ROLE OF MIXED DELIVERY**

As shown in Pre-K programming models in cities such as [Boston](#), [San Antonio](#), and [Denver](#), families choose programming that best matches the needs of their families. With this in mind, it is important to recognize the role of a mixed delivery model in an early childhood hub model. For this report, the mixed delivery model is defined as housing community partners ( i.e., Fraser, Head Start) within the Saint Paul Public School facility.

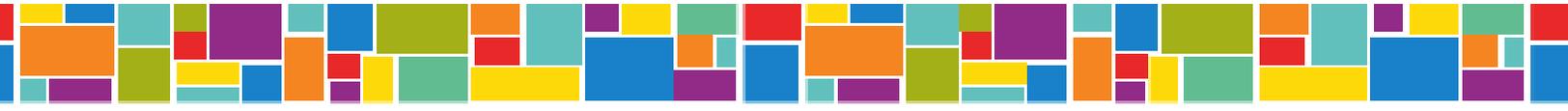
By implementing a mixed delivery model, families will have access to needed community resources and early learning programming that best matches their needs.

Based upon feedback from the Early Childhood Envision group members, community partners such as Head Start and Fraser could occupy space within the early learning hub model. Agreements with community partners may offer lease opportunities. Additional community partners that should be considered would offer services such as WIC, Housing, Dental, Medical, Food Pantry, etc.

The Saint Paul Public Schools partners with various [early care and education centers](#) across the city. Partnerships will be maintained, honored, and recognized for their impact on readiness for kindergarten.

### **IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL PRE-K FOR THREE AND FOUR-YEAR-OLD PROGRAMMING**

Based upon the most recent information from the nationwide push for Universal Pre-K and the citywide effort of 3K, Saint Paul Public Schools programming will need to accommodate classrooms for three and four-year-old children.



Many questions regarding three and four-year-old programming exist. To date, the Saint Paul Public School district is awaiting clarification on:

- Length of day for three-year-olds
- Multiage versus single age band classrooms
- The ratio of classrooms for three and four-year-olds
- Teacher licensure

Until a full directive is available, planning for three-year-old programming is ~~unknown~~ and speculative.

### **FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS - LEARNING LAB**

The Saint Paul Public Schools should create a partnership with a local university to create a pipeline of early childhood educators (ECFE, ECSE, Pre-K). The learning lab concept would be housed within the Saint Paul Public Schools early childhood hub model. Teacher candidates would be in classrooms learning through experience while completing required practicum and student teaching experience.

The learning lab can also serve as a connection to grow your own teacher development and a pipeline for paraprofessionals to earn their undergraduate degrees and teaching license. This model would provide more equitable opportunities for current Saint Paul Public School paraprofessional staff to advance their careers through experiential learning opportunities and flexible timing for their coursework.

Joint professional development opportunities for the Saint Paul Public Schools, Head Start, and child care professionals can be offered in the Learning Lab.

## **V. INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER WORKGROUPS - consider the following:**

### **a. How does your focus area intersect with other Envision Workgroup focus areas?**

The Early Childhood Envision proposal has direct implications for the Specialized Services pathways and continued expansion of full-day ECSE classrooms. By moving to the hub model, considerations must be made for specialized programming pathways.

In addition, the Early Childhood Envision proposal supports aligned resources for Early Childhood Family Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Early Childhood Screening, and Pre-Kindergarten programming. This collaboration would allow for well-rounded opportunities for early learners and their families.

### **b. What information will you need from other workgroups to complete your work?**

Nothing at this time.



c. **What information from your workgroup is relevant to share with other workgroups?**

Alignment of early learning programming will impact K-5 enrollment, school-based offerings (Pre-K and Early Childhood Special Education).

## VI. LIST OF DATA SOURCES

- A. [Analysis Report - Early Childhood](#)
- B. [Early Childhood Screening Statute](#)
- C. [ECFE Statute](#)
- D. [ECSE State Statute - Setting](#)
- E. [Minnesota Department of Education Guide for Planning School Construction Projects](#)
- F. [Parent Aware](#)
- G. [School Readiness](#)
- H. [State Statute - Staff Ratio](#)
- I. [Underenrollment in School-Based Early Learning Programs and Kindergarten](#)
- J. [Voluntary Pre-K](#)