

Lafayette Oxford University Excel by 5 Coalition

January – December 2015 Activities and Accomplishments

After more than two years of work, Lafayette County was certified by Excel by 5 as a child-friendly community in April 2013. In 2014, the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition began the process of working towards recertification (anticipated to be completed in spring 2016), while also striving to go “above and beyond” the 30 official Excel by 5 requirements.

In so doing, major areas of emphasis for the Coalition include: 1) expanding the reach of our efforts to more children, parents, and providers, with a particular focus on serving a more diverse group of Lafayette County families; 2) increasing collaboration across the Coalition’s focus groups, thereby enhancing our effectiveness and efficiency; and 3) better assessing our impact—and thereby continuously improving our work in more informed and strategic ways. Specific activities undertaken during 2015 included:

1. Community-Wide Meetings/Surveys Focused on Early Childhood

Coalition Meetings (meeting of all those who have expressed an interest in the work of the coalition; also open and advertised to the public):

*****February 5, 2015** – Held at the Chamber of Commerce and **16 people** attended. Focus Group Chairs provided an overview of recent Coalition activities and successes, as well as a preview of the upcoming 3rd annual EXCELebration.

*****May 8, 2015**– Held in conjunction with the monthly Steering Committee Meeting at the Lafayette County & Oxford Public Library and **20 people** attended. Dr. Franziska Reff from Baby University in Clarksdale, Mississippi presented about her 8-week long program to help new mothers in the Delta learn how to support optimal child development. Kathleen Sullivan, Chair of the Community Research Focus Group, presented a summary of results of the survey of kindergarten parent knowledge of key concepts in child development, including common misconceptions.

*****August 27, 2015**– Held at the home of the Early Care & Education Co-Chair Linda Glaze and **29 attended**. Attendees were given an update about the Coalition’s activities to date and were inspired to continue to advocate for our youngest children. It was also a social get-together to thank our volunteers and to engage new community members, including leaders in our schools, universities, and businesses.

*****November 30, 2015**– Held at the Chamber of Commerce and **23 attended**. This meeting featured a panel of speakers who facilitate parent support/education programs in the LOU community: Meg Hayden from the Exchange Club Family Center’s To Love a Child program, Monique Findley from Early Years Network, and Wanda Woods from Family Crisis Services. Each speaker gave a short summary of

her program and then responded to questions from the moderator and coalition. A focus of the questions was on the biggest challenges that the programs face and how the EB5 Coalition can better support them in their efforts to serve LOU.

Community Conversation (purpose is to report on the coalition's activities and plans and seek input, feedback and buy-in from the community at large):

*****Ongoing throughout the year** – A community conversation on the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition's vision and goals was held in conjunction with the community play dates at the Jackson Avenue Center. Just **over 70 people** (who together are caring for approximately 120 children under 5) participated in this component of the play dates. Community members received information on the work of the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition and then completed brief surveys designed by the Community Research focus group. The surveys asked them to identify community resources helpful in raising young children, unmet needs that they face in raising young children, and ways in which the community could better support them in raising young children. Relative levels of need and interest reported are in Appendices A, B, & C.

Community Engagement Session (purpose is to inform selected groups in the community about the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition and how they can be involved):

*****January 13, 2015**– The Women's Forum of Oxford, MS invited Katherine Drinkwater, Associate Director of United Way of Oxford & Lafayette County and LOU Excel by 5 Coalition Steering Committee member, to present on the local Excel by 5 work. She presented on the following topics: the importance of Excel by 5, what Excel by 5 is (and is not), what the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition has done, and how individuals can get involved. Approximately **20 people** were present.

Survey of Kindergarten Parent Knowledge of Early Child Development (purpose is to inform the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition of priority focus areas)

During **Fall 2014**, the parents of all kindergarteners at all local public schools and one private school received a survey designed to assess their level of knowledge of key concepts in early child development. The survey was adapted from a validated tool created by the nationally recognized organization, Zero to Three. During **Spring 2015**, the survey results were compiled and analyzed by the Coalition. Almost 70% of parents completed the survey and their responses provided great insight into parents' understanding of early childhood development. Notably, there were some very common perceptions that are inconsistent with current research – indicating that they are important focus areas for Coalition efforts. See Appendix D.

2. Resources for the Community

Early Childhood Resource Guide, originally published in 2012, was updated again in 2015 and distributed at community events, at the Family Resource Center, and in newborn packets provided to the hospital for distribution to all new families. (See below for more details about the channels through which guides were disseminated.)

Family Resource Center (FRC) opened in 2013 as a partnership between the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, United Way and the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition, with additional funding from the LOFT Foundation. The LOU Excel by 5 Coalition engaged the Early Years Network (formerly the Mississippi Child Care Resource & Referral Network), which was able to establish a hub in Oxford to serve parents and childcare centers in Lafayette County and 6 other surrounding counties. The FRC provides a lending library of toys, books, supplies, and training materials for the community and the region. As of spring 2014, the FRC is staffed full-time by Melissa Leach, who works as a Program Assistant for the Early Years Network (and who formerly served as an AmeriCorps VISTA with United Way). With a full-time staff person, the FRC's hours are much more regular and its outreach efforts have been enhanced, with community usage increasing accordingly. Melissa Leach is joined at the FRC by Monique Findley, a parent educator employed by The Early Years Network. Both Melissa Leach and Monique Findley are actively engaged with the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition as members of the Family & Parent Support focus group. **Total visits to the FRC during 2015: 760.**

A second **Born Learning Trail**, which was installed at River's Hill Park in April 2015 by United Way and Mr. & Miss Ole Miss with support from the Coalition, consists of 10 activity stations that promote early childhood learning and development through outdoor experiences. **12 people** were recruited by Mr. & Miss Ole Miss to help with the installation of the trail, which was officially opened with a ribbon cutting. This is the second Born Learning Trail that the Coalition has supported in Lafayette County. The first Born Learning Trail is located at Avent Park and it is now complemented by a Little Free Library, installed by the United Way-led LOU Reads Coalition.

3. **Community-Wide Events Organized by Others**

In 2015, the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition partnered with other community organizations to bring an early childhood focus, information, and materials to the following events:

Party in the Park, May 2015– The Coalition attended this event organized by Family Crisis Services of North Mississippi, where the Health & Safety focus group provided LOU Excel by 5 Coalition resources to caregivers, while also showcasing developmentally appropriate activities for young children. **(Over 300 attendees.)**

Baby Fair, May 2015 – The Coalition attended this event organized by Baptist Memorial Hospital—North Mississippi, where Coalition members provided expecting parents with information on upcoming Coalition activities, the Family Resource Center, community resources, and babies' physical development and milestones. **(Over 200 attendees.)**

Children's Health Fair, August 2015 – The Coalition co-sponsored this event, which was organized by Baptist Memorial Hospital—North Mississippi. The Health & Safety focus group provided families with information on healthy early childhood nutrition, early childhood development, and early literacy. The focus group provided

children with a related developmentally appropriate activity: “healthy food sorting,” using MyPlate resources from the USDA. The focus group also distributed information on community resources and the Family Resource Center. Finally, the Coalition helped arrange for the availability at the Health Fair of dental, hearing, and developmental screenings. The Coalition helped recruit vendors with an early childhood focus and reminded vendors to consider the younger attendees in their booths. (Approximately 800 attendees, including approximately 500 children.)

Growing a Great Reader Workshops, 8 throughout the year – The Coalition supported and provided information to parents at these workshops, which were hosted by the LOU Reads Coalition. Each workshop took place at a different child care center, preschool, or public event/location (including the Baby Fair, Health Fair, and public library). The workshop focused on easy ways to get their children reading, writing, and talking each day. (Approximately 85 adult attendees.)

4. Community-Wide Events Organized by the Coalition

EXCELebration 2015 – The LOU Excel by 5 Coalition, in collaboration with United Way of Oxford and Lafayette County, hosted the third annual EXCELebration on Saturday, March 28, 2015 at the Jackson Avenue Center. (Almost 162 people attended the event (including 72 parents and 90 children), not counting dozens of vendors and volunteers.) This was a free event, open to the public, but targeted specifically for families with children ages 5 years and younger. The purpose of the event was to build community awareness of the importance of the early childhood years, support families in promoting healthy development, and celebrate families and children, especially those under age 5. Activities, which were designed to be easily replicable, included arts, crafts, songs, stories, and games. In addition, adults received valuable information on child development and local early childhood resources from our vendors, which included child care centers, non-profit agencies working to support early childhood development, and many others.

Community Play Dates – The LOU Excel by 5 Coalition, in partnership with United Way of Oxford & Lafayette County, hosted community play dates on Saturday, January 31, 2015 and October 3, 2015 at the Jackson Avenue Center. (Approximately 275 people, including 160 children, attended these events.) (This is a combined total, which may therefore include duplicates.) The events were free and open to the public. The Family Resource Center provided age-appropriate games and toys. The purpose of the events were to provide families with a fun and safe place to spend a Saturday morning, to foster relationships between children and caregivers, to introduce families to the Family Resource Center, and to model the use of developmentally appropriate games and toys with young children.

An outdoor **Community Water Playdate** was also held at Avent Park on June 20, 2015. The event featured affordable and easily replicable water play activities for families to enjoy. (Approximately 80 people attended, including 50 children.)

5. Family & Parent Workshops & Services

Newborn Packets –Throughout the year, 1000 newborn packets were delivered to the maternity ward at Baptist Memorial Hospital-North Mississippi. The newborn packets, which were thoroughly revamped midway through 2014, now include an updated Early Childhood Resource Guide, a high-quality DVD modeling safe & healthy newborn care, a infant book, critical safety resources (such as plug covers), and other information and materials to support new parents. The revamped newborn packets were designed in collaboration with Baptist Memorial Hospital and are distributed in conjunction with the Hospital’s own newborn care materials.

More than 500 newborn packets were prepared by community volunteers, including employees from Trustmark Bank and Oxford University Bank, during workplace volunteer opportunities coordinated by United Way.

Promotion of Positive Early Childhood Development Practices – As a result of the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition’s efforts and partnerships, a high-quality DVD modeling safe & healthy newborn care continues to be shown on continuous loop at several highly-trafficked service agencies, including the Health Department. It is impossible to know how many people viewed the DVD, but the Health Department served **hundreds of beneficiaries** during the period reported here.

Transitioning to Kindergarten – This workshop, which was held March 3, 2015, brought together families, childcare administrators, and pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs (including all schools/school districts), to discuss “kindergarten readiness” and inform families of how they can support their children in a smooth transition. The workshop was held at First Baptist Church. **30 parents/guardians attended.**

6. Early Childhood Educator Support

Educational Partners Meetings – As required by Excel by 5, Educational Partners Meetings, attended by representatives of child care centers, Head Start, and local schools serving children under 5, were held throughout 2015. Meetings were held in May 2015 and October 2015. These meetings included professional development on a variety of key topics, as well as networking/support. **Attendees: May: 18 and October: 12**

Professional Development Conference – A special Educational Partners Meeting was held in October 2015. This meeting was a very-well attended professional development conference, at which attendees from several different childcare centers and schools each received 5 hours of state-recognized staff development. 12 workshops, which were led by early childhood experts, were organized into three different tracks (infant/toddler, preschool, and general); examples of topics covered include creating healthy attachment, reading aloud to young children, developing self-control in toddlers, and encouraging healthy eating at school and at home. In

addition, Dr. Cathy Grace, a nationally respected expert on early childhood development and a new member of the UM School of Education faculty, was the keynote speaker for the event. **Attendees: Approximately 60.**

Child Care Center Director Newsletter – The Early Care & Education focus group sends a period newsletter to all child care center directors, highlighting childhood resources, providing tips and tools, and spotlighting a new center with each edition.

Meeting Excel by 5 Standards – Among the Early Care and Education standards required for our coalition’s recertification in 2016, local Excel by 5 coalitions must adhere to the following requirements (shown in italics). We consider these four Excel by 5 standards to be our coalition’s Early Care and Education outcome measurement goals. The LOU Excel by 5 coalition provides encouragement, training, and other support to help child care providers meet these standards. The outcome measurement figures mentioned below are estimates based on informal Early Care and Education focus group inquiries and have not been audited by local or state Excel by 5 personnel.

**** Coordinate at least three (3) Educational Partner meetings annually:* As noted above, the Early Care and Education focus group convened 2 educational partner meetings in 2015. Moving forward, we have 2 additional meetings planned for spring 2016. We are working to ensure that all required representatives are present at all Educational Partner meetings (including representatives from both school districts).

**** Demonstrate that sixty percent (60%) or more of licensed early care providers participated in an environmental evaluation using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-R (ECERS-R) and/or the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-R (ITERS-R) within the certification timeline.* As of 2/2016, 6 of the 12 centers stated they were enrolled in the state Quality Rating and Improvement System, which means they are being evaluated annually. In addition, 1 center has requested an evaluation from the Early Years Network. **As of 2/2016, 7 of our 12 child care centers (58%) are already participating or have committed to participate in an evaluation.**

**** Demonstrate that forty percent (40%) or more of licensed child care providers have forty percent (40%) or more of their educational staff attaining twenty (20) or more professional development hours per licensure year.* **As of 2/2016, 8 of our 12 child care centers (67%) stated that at least 40% of their full time staff have 20+ professional development hours.**

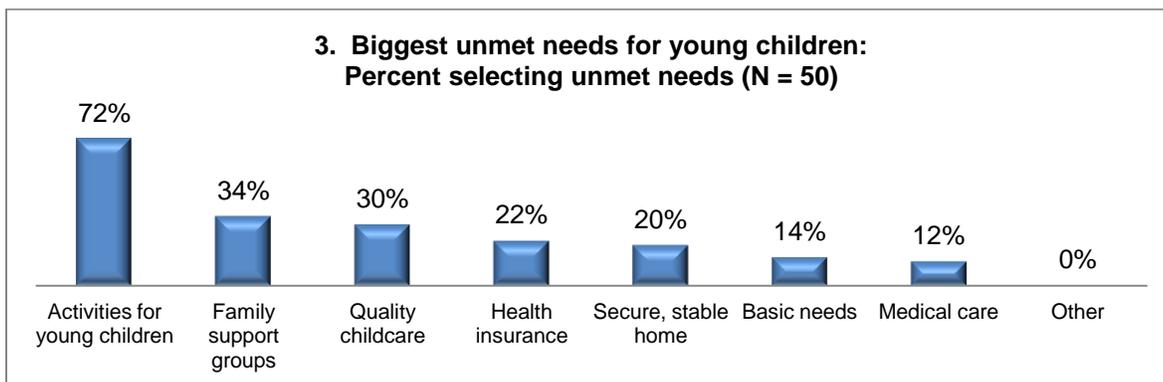
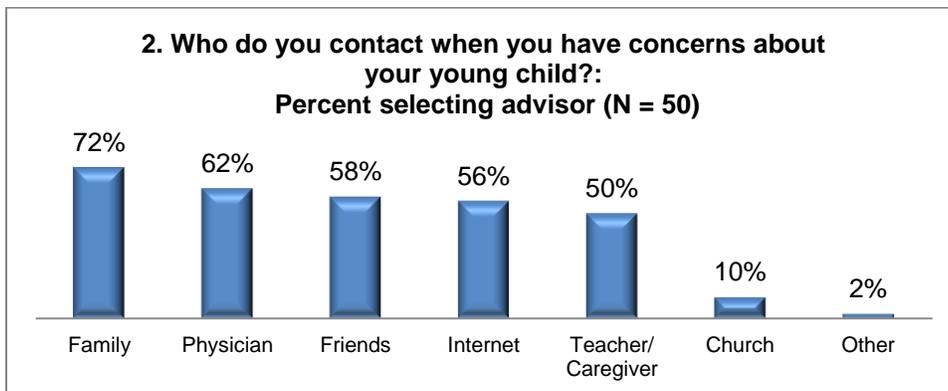
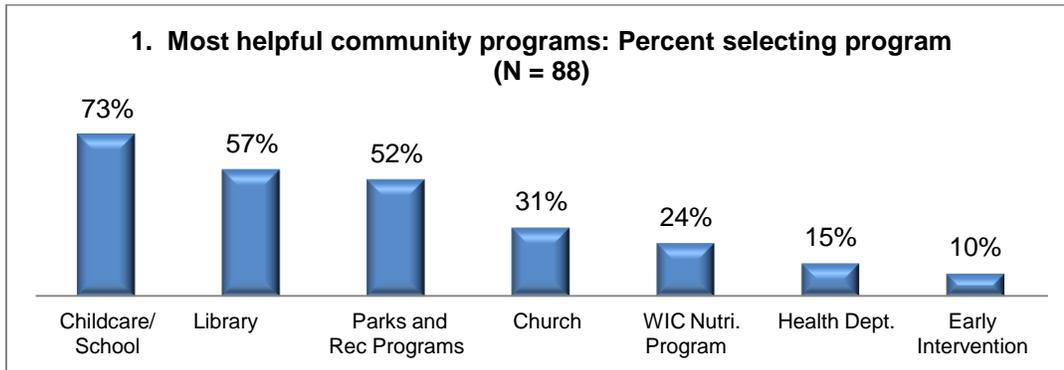
**** Demonstrate that forty percent (40%) or more of licensed early care providers have forty percent (40%) or more “highly trained” educational staff.* **As of 2/2016, 5 of our 12 child care centers (42%) have 40% of staff that are highly trained, as**

evidenced by staff that have a CDA, associate's degree or higher, or Montessori certified training.

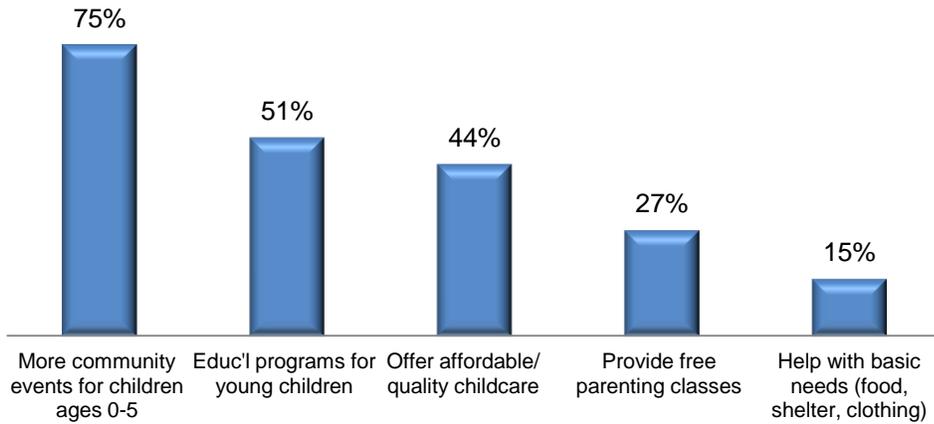
The Early Care and Education focus group currently is working with child care center staff to ensure that the LOU Excel by 5 Coalition will meet the required criteria by May 2016.

Appendix A

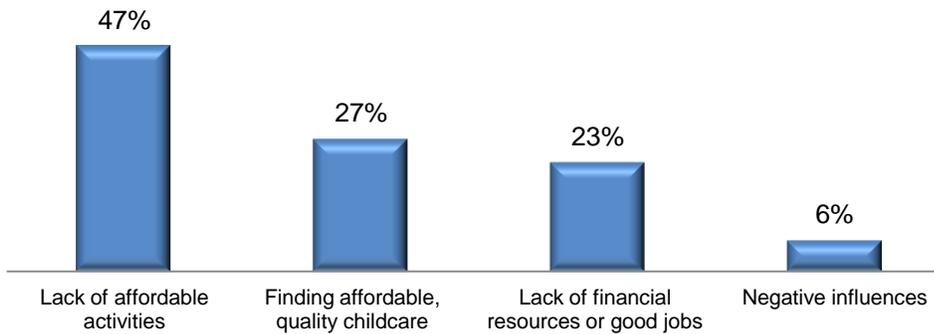
The charts below illustrate LOU parents' needs and concerns drawn from parent (or caregiver) survey responses collected at three 2015 events: the January 31 2015 Community Playdate, the March 28 2015 EXCELebration, and the October 3 2015 Community Playdate.



4. Ways community could improve support for families with young children: Percent selecting support need (N = 88)

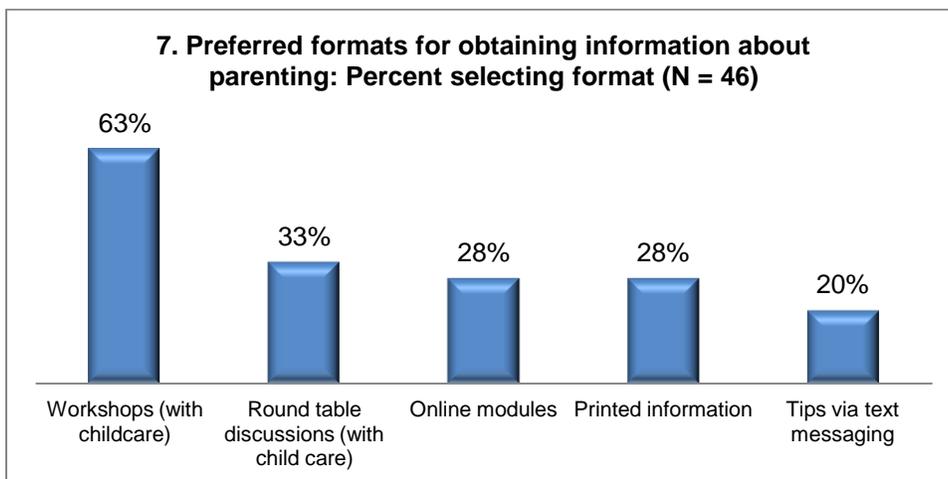
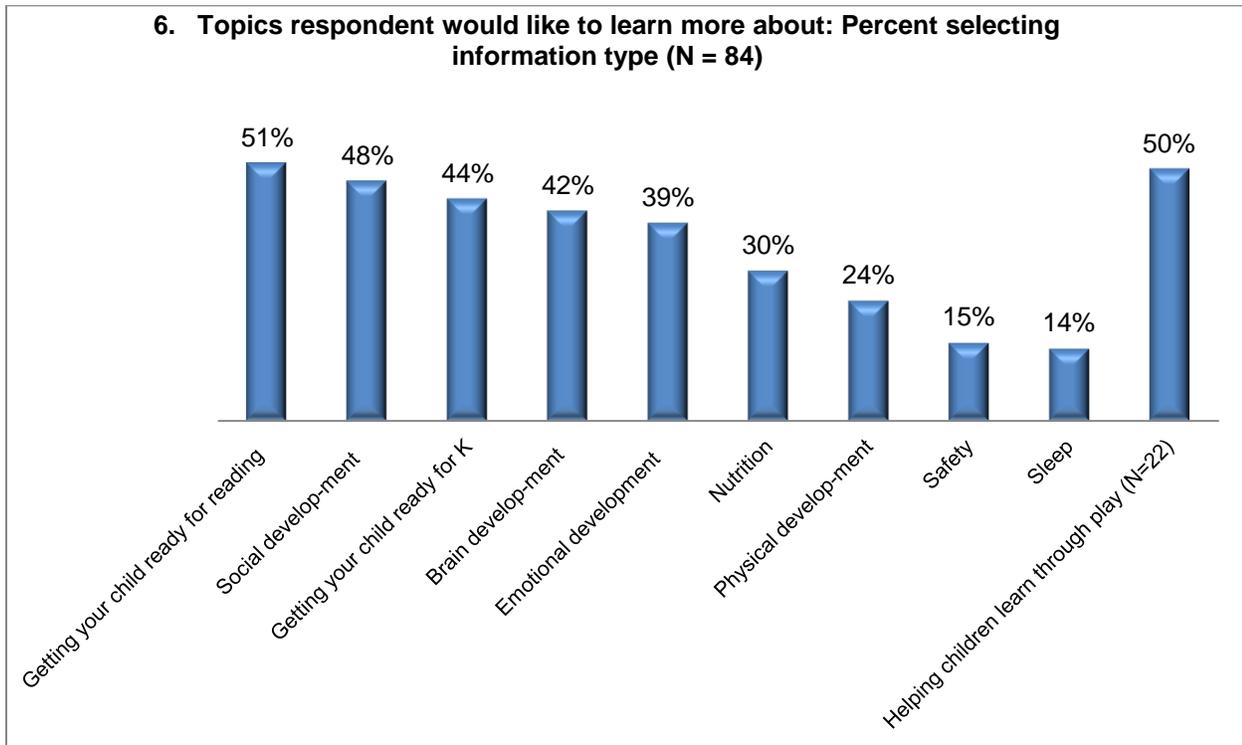


5. Hardest part of raising a child: Percent selecting difficulty (N = 62)



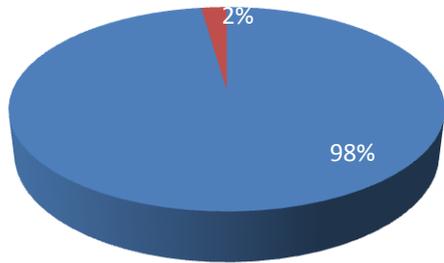
Appendix B

The charts below illustrate parents' and caregivers' interest in receiving additional information and opportunities for Excel by 5 activities; their perceptions of children's responses to Excel by 5 events; and their intention to use information and skills at home (drawn from parent or caregiver survey responses collected at three 2015 events: the January 31 2015 Community Playdate, the March 28 2015 EXCELebration, and the October 3 2015 Community Playdate).



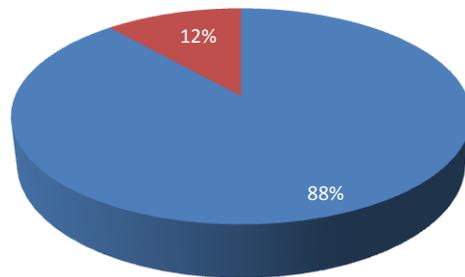
8. Parent's perception of child's experience with Play Date/Excelebration (N = 88)

■ Enjoyed it a lot ■ Enjoyed it a little ■ Did not enjoy 0%



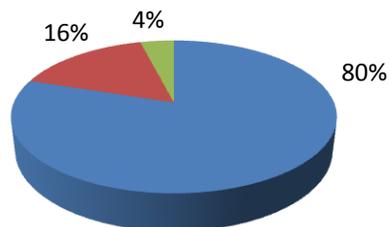
9. How interested is respondent in helping their child learn through play? (N = 26)

■ Very interested ■ Interested ■ Not interested ■ Didn't notice this information



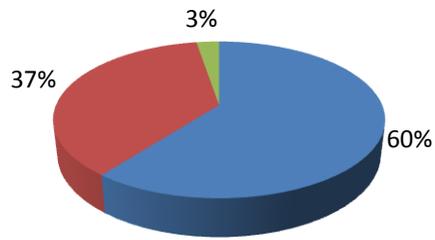
10. Does respondent intend to use learning-through-play methods featured in the October Play Date? (N = 25)

■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No



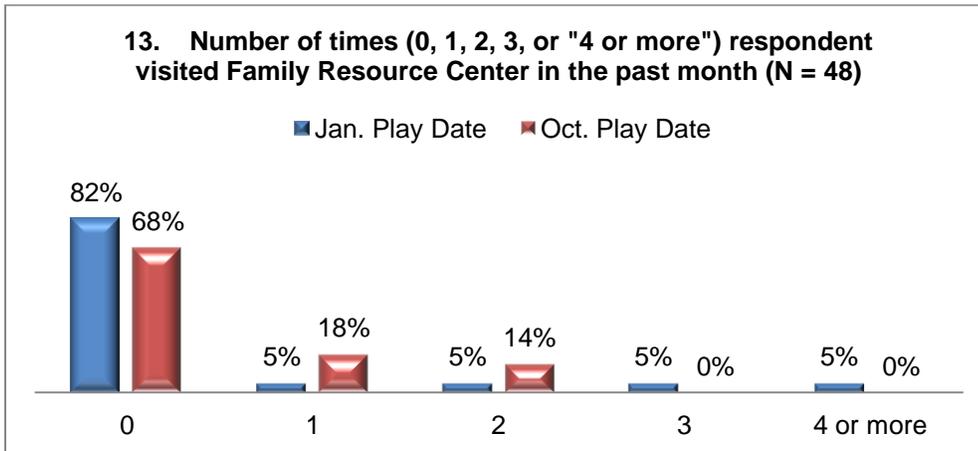
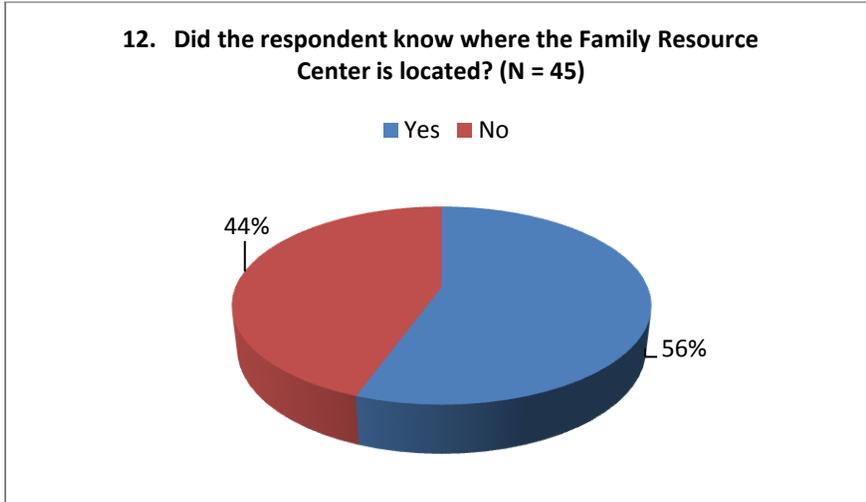
11. Does respondent intend to use Excelebration activities at home? (N = 38)

■ Yes, many ■ Yes, several ■ Didn't find any I would use

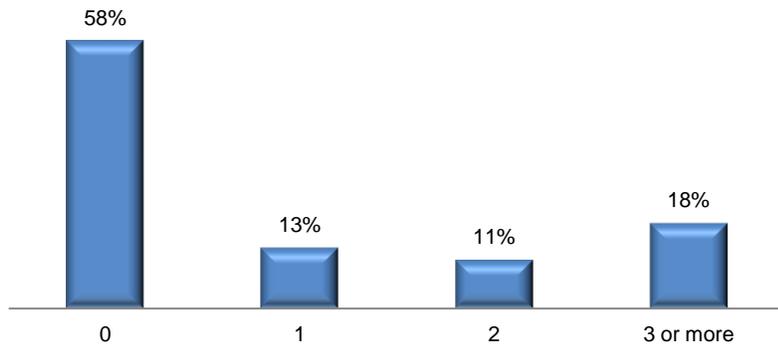


Appendix C

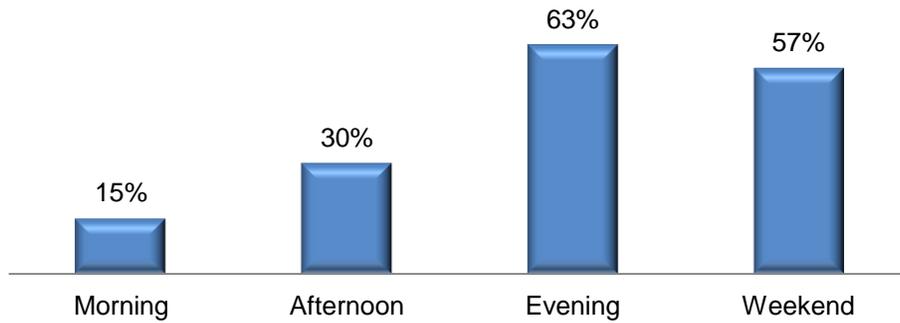
Parents'/caregivers' familiarity with the FRC and preferred center hours (drawn from parent or caregiver survey responses collected at three 2015 events: the January 31 2015 Community Playdate, the March 28 2015 EXCELebration, and the October 3 2015 Community Playdate).



14. Times visited FRC in the past 6 months (Data collected at March 2015 Excelebration, N = 38)



15. Most convenient hours to visit Family Resource Center (N = 47)



Appendix D

Areas of Concern and Areas of Strength Identified through LOU Eb5 Fall 2014 Survey of LOU Kindergarten Parents

Item	<p style="text-align: center;">High-Priority Areas of Concern</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Item topic followed by (response choice consistent with research) and [Category]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Percent of Parent Responses Inconsistent with Research*</p>
10	Whether a 15 month old is too young to be expected to share her toys with other children (yes) [Parents' Expectations]	85
25	Whether talking to one's child about sexual abuse should begin when the child enters Kindergarten (no, should begin earlier) [Safety]	75
12	Whether children who are spanked as a regular form of punishment are more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive (yes) [Punishment]	58
11	Whether a three-year-old is too young to be expected to sit quietly for an hour or so, be it in church or in a restaurant (yes) [Parents' Expectations]	49
16	Whether children usually have stronger bonds with parents who do not work and stay at home than with those who work full time outside of the home (no) [Parent-Child Relationships/nurturing]	42
14	Whether frequent changes in childcare providers can positively impact an infant's development because it makes them more adaptable (no) [Parent-Child Relationships/nurturing]	39
12	Whether spanking children as a regular form of punishment helps children develop a better sense of self-control (no) [Punishment]	36
7	In terms of learning about language, whether children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them (no) [Early Learning]	32
9	Whether a child aged six-months or younger who witnesses violence , such as seeing a father often hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects from the experiences, because children that age have no long-term memory at that age (no) [Parent-Child Relationships /Nurturing]	31
5	Whether a child around the age of one month can sense when a parent is depressed and can also be affected by the depression (yes) [Parent-Child Relationships /Nurturing]	30

* Includes "Don't know" responses.

Item	Areas of Relative Strength	Percent of Parent Responses Inconsistent with Research*
3	The period when children begin to recognize their mother's voice (at or around birth)	2%
1	The earliest stage of life at which parents significantly impact children's brain development (the prenatal stage)	6%
4	The stage when children begin to take in and react to the world around them (at birth)	8%
20	Whether breastfeeding is the ideal method of feeding and nurturing infants (yes)	9%

* Includes "Don't know" responses.