

# Somerville Child Care Choices (CCC) Study Findings

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JANUARY 4, 2022

# Project Overview

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- ❑ Partnership with Somerville Public Schools/Somerville Partnership for Young Children and St. John's University
- ❑ Funded by the American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
June 2020-September 2021

# Research Team

Conducted in Partnership with  
Somerville Public Schools  
Department of Early Education  
including the Somerville  
Partnership for Young Children.

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# Research Questions

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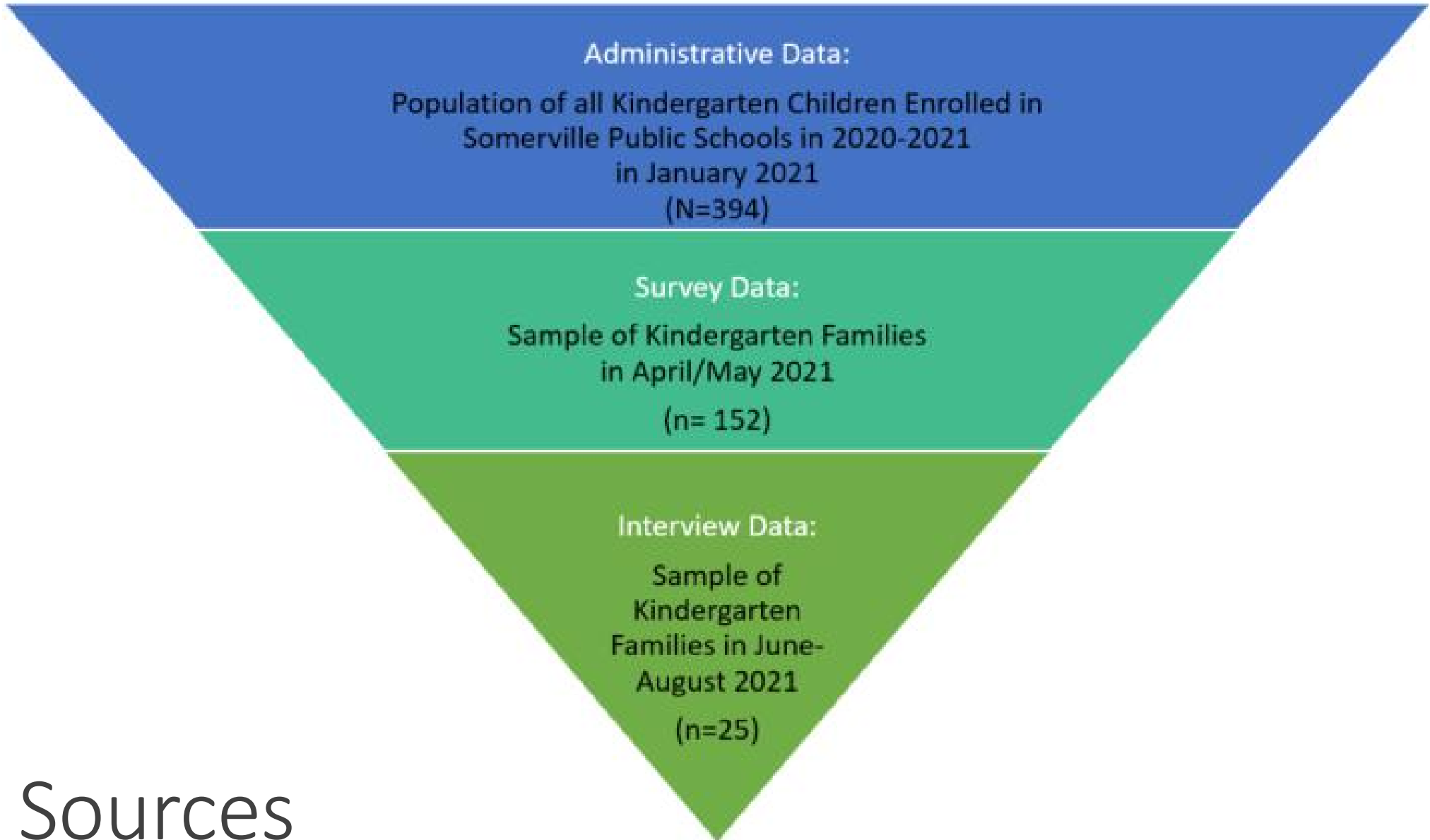
- 1) What early education and care options are families using for their children before kindergarten?
- 2) How do families make decisions about early education and care?
- 3) Do families have the information they need to make decisions?
  - Where do families get information about what is available?
  - Is the information easy to access?



# Participants

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Families of kindergarteners in  
Somerville during the 2020-2021 school year.



# Data Sources

# Characteristics of Participants

Child Characteristics	Population of All Kindergarten Children N= 394	Survey Participants' Child n=149 <sup>a</sup>	Interview Participants' Child n= 24 <sup>b</sup>
Female	49%	48%	72%
Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible	28%	20%	8%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	27%	21%	8%
Special Education Eligible	15%	13%	16%
School-Communication Preference			
English	77%	85%	100%
Spanish	16%	8%	0%
Other	7%	7%	0%
Race			
White	71%	75%	68%
Black	8%	5%	0%
Asian	9%	8%	4%
Multiple/Other	11%	11%	24%
Hispanic/Latino	31%	22%	20%

# Research Question 1

WHAT EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE OPTIONS ARE FAMILIES USING FOR THEIR CHILDREN BEFORE KINDERGARTEN?



# Preschool Experiences

Type	Population of All Kindergarten Children N= 394	Survey Participants' Child n=149 <sup>a</sup>	Interview Participants' Child n= 24 <sup>b</sup>
Somerville Public Schools Preschool	52%	48%	28%
Somerville Center or Family Child Care Program	17%	25%	28%
Head Start	13%	9%	12%
Center not in Somerville or Cambridge	7%	5%	20%
No Preschool	5%	3%	0%
Center in Cambridge	4%	5%	12%
No Response	2%	4%	n/a

# What is the likelihood of attending a preschool type based on characteristics?

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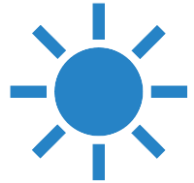
- ❑ Children whose family's preferred language for school communication was a language other than English were significantly **more likely** to be in no preschool program or Head Start, compared to being in Somerville Public Schools Preschool.
- ❑ Children from families who qualified for free/reduced lunch were **less likely** to be in Somerville centers or centers outside of Somerville compared to Somerville Public Schools Preschool.
- ❑ Children from families identifying as Hispanic/Latino were **less likely** to be in Somerville centers compared to Somerville Public School Preschool.

# A More Nuanced Look at ECE from Surveys

Type	% of Families Using Each Type <sup>a</sup>	% of Families where child spent most time <sup>b</sup>
Somerville Public Schools Preschool	44%	40%
Somerville Community Schools After School Program	17%	1%
Head Start	11%	10%
Center in Somerville	24%	19%
Center in Other City/Town	10%	9%
Family Child Care	2%	2%
Grandparent	7%	2%
Sibling	1%	0%
Other Relative	5%	2%
Neighbor/Friend	3%	2%
Nanny/Au Pair/Babysitter	12%	4%
Other	0%	11%

# Time in Most Used Arrangement

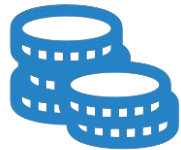
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The majority of children spent 5 days a week in their most used arrangement



On average children spent 6.8 hours per day (range: 3-11 hours)



47% reported it was free, 36% full price, 5% reported getting financial support



47% started using this arrangement in 2019 and about half started earlier

# Voices of Families Interviewed

## *Two Main Themes:*

1. Most working families needed *more than one arrangement* to meet the needs of parent work schedules.
2. Families with more than one child sometimes had more than one arrangement to *meet the different needs of individual children.*



So the nanny at the time, she would, she would pick up my baby... my toddler, she would pick up the baby at around eight o'clock at 8:15. And then she would drop the baby at five. And there was an arrangement where because I worked downtown, and it was kind of far away from me, she would pick up [older child] at 4:40 [from preschool] and come to my house with the baby. So, she would basically have the two kids and by the time I get home, which is usually a 5:15, 5:30. You know, she will help me with some of the bath time so I can make dinner.

-Interview 01

# Research Question 2

HOW DO FAMILIES MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE?

# Decision-Making Activities



Decision Activities	% Full Survey Sample (n=132)	Somerville Public Schools Preschool (n=62)	Not in Somerville Public Schools Preschool (n=65)
Spoke with family, neighbors, friends	57%	58%	58%
Visited programs in person	49%	42%	55%
Visited program websites	45%	45%	46%
Spoke with program staff	42%	31%**	54%
Spoke with teacher/director at past program	23%	18%	26%
Used Experience from searches for other children	20%	26%*	12%
Drove/Walked Around	8%	6%	11%
Other	8%	10%	7%
Searched MA EEC Website	7%	8%	6%
Contacted Child Care Choices of Boston	5%	5%	5%
Contacted social welfare provider	4%	5%	3%
Visited Somerville Partnership for Young Children Website	3%	5%	2%
Average Number of Decision Activities	2.69(1.63)	2.58 (0.19)	2.86(0.22)

Source: Somerville CCC Survey, 2021.

# Decision Factors



Factors Considered	% Full Survey Sample (n=132)	Somerville Public Schools Preschool (n=63)	Not in Somerville Public Schools Preschool (n=64)
Social interaction for child	71%	68%	72%
Location to home	67%	65%	67%
Cost	63%	71%*	53%
Educational activities	50%	52%	47%
Preparation for kindergarten for child	44%	52%*	34%
Teacher qualifications	37%	37%	34%
Needs of other children	33%	40%	28%
Trust provider	29%	16%**	38%
Location to work	24%	2%	3%
Prior relationship with provider	20%	16%	23%
Flexible schedules	17%	6%***	30%
Had openings for child	17%	24%*	9%
Location to public transit	11%	6%	2%
Teach child English	11%	10%	11%
Quality Rating	10%	8%	11%
Speak home language to child	7%	2%*	13%
Licensing Status	7%	8%	5%
Special Education Services	6%	11%*	2%
Financial Aid/Subsidy or voucher	5%	2%*	9%
Transportation provided	2%	3%	2%
Average Number of Factors Considered	5.30(2.66)	5.21(0.33)	5.28(0.34)

Source: Somerville CCC Survey, 2021.



# Interview Findings

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## THEMES

Logistics that work for the whole family

Searches are cumulative over time & across children

Families are concerned about continuity & minimizing transitions



## EXEMPLAR QUOTES

“We felt so constrained, you know, we had, we had our kind of list of requirements, right, like, we had, you know, our financial limits of like, what we could afford, and most childcare was out of reach. At least most centers that I that I saw, like a [private for profit center] or something was just not feasible for us. So there were the financial considerations. And then there was the location consideration, because we were, you know, didn't have a car, and we're really limited geographically... my spouse and I both worked full-time in Boston... Once we were planning on having our second then it was an easy decision to you know, put her name on the list for a spot, [program] is very good about reserving space for siblings, you know, for established families and so, so it felt like a big relief, not to have to kind of go through that hunt again, but to know in advance that we had a spot and it was, it was all kind of settled.” (Interview 17)

"Whereas in Somerville, you know, we felt reasonably confident that we would get went [Somerville elementary school] kindergarten, but not having to kind of settling him, uprooting him, and settling him somewhere else potentially for one year.” (Interview 14)

# Interview Findings

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## THEMES

All families consider cost

Families trust other families to provide referrals

Aligning Home and Early Education and Care Culture & Values



## EXEMPLAR QUOTES

"If I go work, I'm going to have to pay someone to drive her to school, and pick her up from school. And to take care of her after school. Plus, someone to take care of my son. Would be like, out of my, my... No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't be able to do it. I did the math. Like even if I find like the cheapest thing. I'll be paying to work." (Interview 16)

"I have been very happy with ECIP [early childhood integrated preschool at Somerville Public Schools]. And I would not have known about that, if it weren't for my landlords whose grandson went through this. And they just raved about it." (Interview 04)

"We settled on this one because it was one of the least expensive, and also because we're [religion], and this was run out of a [house of worship]. So, it had a little bit of [religious] education into it as well." (Interview 09)

# Research Question 3

DO FAMILIES HAVE THE INFORMATION THEY NEED TO MAKE DECISIONS?

# Did families know about Somerville Public Schools Preschool & Head Start?

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**70%** of survey respondents knew **Somerville offered free full day preschool (8:45-1:45pm)**

- of those who were familiar with it, 79% considered sending their child there.

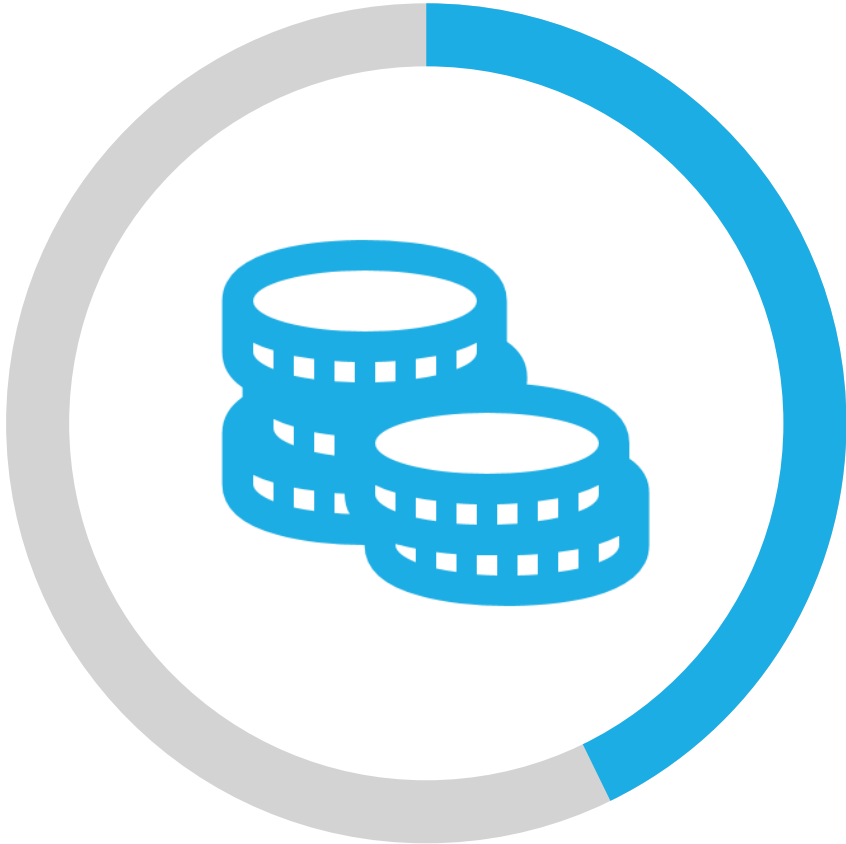
**69%** of survey respondents knew that **Head Start programs** were available in Somerville

- of those who were familiar with it, 29% considered Head Start for their child

# Did families know about Financial Aid?

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- 43% knew that financial support was available
- Applied for support
  - Somerville Partnership for Young Children- 4%
  - EEC Voucher- 7%
  - Other- 1%
  - None- 88%



# Interviews: Where do families get information about what is available?

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## THEMES

### Word of mouth recommendations

A lot of work is needed to find out about the details



## EXEMPLAR QUOTES

“I actually reached out to a lot of friends who already had kids a little bit older and I looked at those places because I trusted their recommendations.”  
(Interview 08)

“I have a spreadsheet of all of mine, my neighbor has a spreadsheet, that was another place, you know, people have done the work, a lot of parents have done the work and you just sort of only get it if you kind of find that connection, but I would pass that along. Actually, you know, there's a few parents who have access. It varies slightly by different area too..So, I have found personally that looking at just information like spreadsheets are helpful, because then I can go through them on my own and then follow up with questions.” (Interview 13)

# Interviews: Is the information easy to access?

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## THEMES

## EXEMPLAR QUOTES

### Details about the programs are hard to find

- Families do not feel prepared to assess whether family child care is the right option for them
- Accessing Afterschool & Summer Camp information is also a challenge

“One of the things that was really hard was figuring out what things cost without making a ton of calls. So another thing that I really appreciated about [private center-based program] is they list their prices on their website, and many places don't. So it was a waste of time to try and, you know, contact them and then realize, like, Oh, that's completely out of our budget” (Interview 17)

# Interviews: Is the information easy to access?

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## THEMES

Not all families feel connected to networks for recommendations

Some groups may be less connected to resources than others



## EXEMPLAR QUOTES

“All the other families will grab up the spot on the desired schools. And you'll just end up with like the scraps for the less desired schools. So, there's definitely a need to look at the information economy going on regarding how school choice happens. Like I feel like other parents told each other this but we were out of the loop.” (Interview 15)

“When you have a child with a disability, rates of abuse...those children are more likely to have an adult like just lose patience at them and slap them for instance... I can't just use strangers to look after my kid. Programs are pretty well monitored. The programs couldn't handle my kid or one of the programs couldn't handle one of my kids and the other program one of my kids couldn't handle the program. We've completely ran out of options of what to do. So yeah, that was our childcare experience.” (Interview 15)

“The school sends an email about child care options, about afterschool programs, but it is three pages long. They do not read three pages... the best way to communicate to Latinos is Whatsapp. Email doesn't work, first come, first serve does not work here. When the city or the school wants to communicate with parents they have to understand two things, not only the culture, not only about what are Latinos, but they need to know the cultural knowledge of the families, the cultural knowledge they have is elementary, they will not understand it...The system in Somerville, in all of Massachusetts, is made for the American, not for the Latinos.” (SC11)



# Key Takeaways

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- ❑ Families consider many factors and engage in multiple activities to make their decisions.
- ❑ Accessing information to make decisions is challenging, time consuming, and universal information was limited.
- ❑ Study participants suggested universal mailings, outreach through food pantries, houses of worship, pediatricians' offices, and welcome baby packets.

# Limitations

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- ❑ Samples of survey and interview participants may not fully represent views of all Somerville families
- ❑ Administrative data may not accurately represent the race/ethnicity and languages used at home for Kindergarten families

# Next Steps

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- Working on analyzing COVID-related responses
- What do you see as next steps and implications?



Questions?



Comments?

# Contact

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