“PreK is supposed to be accessible to all families”: Rethinking families’ access to universal publicly funded PreK

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Curriculum & Instruction)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2022

Date of final oral examination: 08/30/22

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Acknowledgments

It took a village for me to do my dissertation research. This dissertation was possible because of the parents of 4K children who agreed to participate in surveys and interviews. I would also like to thank the Madison Education Partnership and the Center for Research on Early Childhood Education for providing funding and support for my dissertation research. Being able to use the data of the broader study was beneficial while pursuing my scholarly interest in this dissertation research.

It would have been a daunting task for me to make my visionary ideas happen without the support from the following people. I cannot thank my advisor, Beth Graue, enough for the support she provided in every step of this dissertation process. I truly enjoyed the intellectual conversations that we had by visualizing our discussions on the Whiteboard. Your thought-provoking questions and guidance have helped me to grow as a scholar. I appreciate you taking the time to listen to me, read my drafts, and provide feedback. I would also like to thank my committee members for their advice and insights on the issues in early childhood education and methodology. Thank you to Lesley Bartlett, Amy Claessens, and Emily Machado. Our discussions in and outside of the classroom or meetings were greatly insightful and helpful.

I have been thankful for having an amazing, supportive group of friends and colleagues throughout the dissertation process. Thank you to J.W. Kim, J.W. Kang, S.M. Lee, S.Y. Heo, Giselle, Christina, Yasmin, and all of my friends living in all different parts of the world for being there for me. I appreciate you all listening to me for hours and sharing all the moments, all the shared laughs, tears, dreams, and wishes through our long conversations, brunches, coffee breaks, strolls, and writing/study groups. Thank you all for bringing joy to my writing process and Ph.D. journey.

This dissertation would have been impossible without my family’s support. Thank you to my grandparents, relatives, and cousins living in all different areas of the world for not making me feel alone on this journey. Our visits and phone/video calls were always delightful breaks from my dissertation writing and gave me much joy. Finally, Mom and Dad, thank you so much for your endless support, encouragement, trust in me, and love. There is really no word for me to express how much I appreciate you both. Your support and love have always made me stay strong, continue pursuing my dreams, live with integrity, and think about what is important in life. You have always been by my side. You gave me listening ears when I thought aloud my visions and big ideas for dissertation chapters. I would like to dedicate this work to you because this is really all your doing. You have always made me feel proud to be born as your daughter. Sa-rang-hae-yo, and you are the source of my energy!
Abstract
Publicly funded Prekindergarten (PreK) has been touted as a panacea for reducing the opportunity gap resulting from “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The growing focus on PreK is based on the promise of broadening access and increasing quality. However, PreK enrollment and quality status lag behind the levels preferred by some scholars (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). These trends made me wonder why or how parents opt into and out of PreK and what kind of quality they look for in PreK enrollment. This dissertation examines how parents made decisions about voluntary, universal 4K enrollment in the urban school district of Madison, Wisconsin; PreK is called a four-year-old kindergarten or 4K in Wisconsin. Through a comparative case study, I examine how parents across programs (including those who opted out) describe their 4K decision-making processes in a district where 4K is provided in public schools and community sites. Even though the district provided parents with multiple 4K options and equal access through public and private partnerships, I find that many parents’ 4K access was limited by their resources, preferences for self-defined quality, and 4K availability with its varied operating schedules in the district. Parents’ access to universal 4K was not simple or easy because they had to find a particular 4K that met their children’s educational and childcare needs simultaneously. However, parents who had more privileges than barriers had relatively easier access to 4K provided in the mixed-delivery system. I argue that these 4K decisions were situated in parental socio-cultural contexts and aimed to accommodate their life contextual factors. Using the results of the dissertation, I reconceptualize the parents’ notions of quality and accessibility in the context of 4K in the Madison Metropolitan School District. I also provide district stakeholders and policymakers with programming suggestions for increasing equitable 4K access that reflects parents’ and children’s needs.
PART I: INTRODUCTION
Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study

Publicly funded Prekindergarten (PreK)\(^1\) has been touted as a panacea for reducing the opportunity gap resulting from “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Advocates assert that PreK will provide equitable access to early education and boost early learning and development for school success (Phillips et al., 2017; Barnett et al., 2018; Valentino, 2018; Meloy et al., 2019). Further, PreK reduces costs through reducing needs for special education and grade retention (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2011; McCoy et al., 2017; Gray-Lobe et al., 2021). Based on these purported benefits, U.S. PreK programs have expanded rapidly with PreK enrollment rates increasing by 35% from 2009 to 2021 (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021).

The growing focus on PreK is based on the promise of broadening access and increasing quality. The reason is that PreK quality\(^2\) plays a crucial role in children’s positive learning outcomes based on research that indicates that children in a high-quality classroom have better outcomes than their peers in lower-quality settings (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2016; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Mashburn et al., 2008; Gormley, 2008). If PreK is to deliver on its promises, access to high-quality PreK is key. Yet, there are circumstantial barriers that prevent marginalized and underserved children from accessing high-quality PreK programs where all children can get the benefits most (Fuller & Leibovitz, 2022; Latham et al., 2021; Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Valentino, 2018). Therefore, to reduce the opportunity gap, it is imperative that all children, including those who are marginalized and underserved, have equitable access to quality PreK.

\(^1\) I follow Friedman-Krauss et al.’s (2020) definition of PreK in this dissertation: the PreK program is funded, controlled, and directed by the state for 3-and/or 4-year-old children.

\(^2\) In the discussion of PreK quality, scholars often explain two types of quality: structural quality (e.g., teacher qualifications, group size, adult-child ratio, and years of experience) and process quality (e.g., provision of appropriate materials and activities, effective teaching, teacher-child relationships/interactions, and instructional methods) (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2005).
However, PreK enrollment and quality status lag behind the levels preferred by some scholars (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). During the 2016-2017 school year when the parents in this current study went through a 4K year, 33% of 4-year-olds nationwide enrolled in a publicly funded PreK program, while 56% did not attend any early childhood program. Even years past, almost 40% of Head Start or PreK eligible students did not participate in center-based programs before kindergarten (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020). While 40% of PreK attendees nationwide were enrolled in low-quality programs, only 8% attended programs that met the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)’s criteria for high-quality PreK (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020). These trends made me wonder why or how parents opt into and out of PreK and what kind of quality families look for in PreK enrollment.

Researchers of childcare and PreK decision-making have found that, rather than being a pure choice, parents’ decision-making is an accommodation to their preferences/beliefs for quality, resources, and PreK availability (Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Johnson et al., 2017; Ansari et al., 2018; Bassok et al., 2018a; Grogan, 2012). Some scholars (Johnson et al., 2017; Ansari et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2019) have pointed out that many under-resourced and minoritized parents have more constraints than opportunities to access quality PreK. These studies helped me to better understand parents’ opportunities and barriers during their PreK decision-making processes.

I have found the following gaps in the existing literature which I would like to fill. First, previous studies did not adequately address accessibility issues, such as hours of operation.

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3 PreK is called 4K in Wisconsin. 28% of the 4K eligible children were not enrolled in universal 4K during the 2016-17 school year in the Madison Metropolitan School District, Wisconsin where this current study was conducted.

4 The State of Preschool reflects the following quality components: standards, curriculum, teacher degree, teacher training, staff professional development, class size, staff-child ratio, screening/referral, and quality improvement system (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020).
parents’ schedules, and inclusive programs for children’s special and language needs. Because some PreK programs are provided under different auspices in the mixed-delivery Early Childhood Education (ECE) system, access to different types of PreK programs needs to be examined to increase equitable accessibility. Second, it is unclear why parents opt out of PreK because most researchers focused on those who opted into the programs. Understanding the needs of parents who opt out of PreK could help district stakeholders and policymakers design PreK programs that increase equitable access. Third, few studies focus on parents’ search process, such as the number of PreK programs considered, the difficulty of the search process, and the sources of information they used. Examining PreK decision-making processes could help us understand how parents navigate opportunities and barriers and get to their final decision. This information could inform the design of PreK programs to alleviate parents’ barriers in access. Fourth, existing studies have not taken an inclusive view of how parental socio-economic status, race, and gender shape selection. Although previous research provides insights into socio-economically under-resourced or Latinx families’ enrollment experiences, we could benefit from understanding experiences across broader socio-economic, race, and gender groups. Finally, most studies have not used qualitative methods that allow us to understand the complexity of decision-making processes from parents’ perspectives. This qualitative research will bring parents’ perspectives on their PreK enrollment process to the fore.

To address the research gaps, I aim to answer the following research question, “How do parents who have multiple options for 4K\(^5\) make decisions about whether and where their child will go to 4K and why?” Through a comparative case study that considers parents who made each different 4K decision as cases, I examine how parents across programs (including those

\(^5\) 4-year-old Kindergarten (4K) is PreK in Wisconsin.
who opted out) describe their 4K decision-making processes in a district where 4K is provided in public schools and community sites. Using the accommodations theoretical framework (Meyers & Jordan, 2006), I aim to describe parental 4K decisions as an accommodation to their families’ life experiences and address how parents’ 4K decisions are situated in their socio-cultural contexts. The results of this study will provide district stakeholders and policymakers with suggestions for increasing equitable 4K access that reflects parents’ and children’s needs.

**Theoretical Framework**

Scholars use two different theoretical frameworks to explain parental childcare and PreK decision-making: (a) rational choice/economic framework and (b) accommodations framework. These two frameworks operate with different premises and focus on different aspects of decision-making. That is, the rational choice/economic framework is “based on traditional economic theory,” whereas the accommodations framework is based on “social and behavioral science theories of a contextualized pattern of action” (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 21). These two frameworks are not contradictory but complementary in that they help us to have a fuller understanding of PreK decision-making. I will first explain these two frameworks’ principles and assumptions that will allow us to better understand parents’ childcare and PreK decision-making. I will then provide reasons that I chose the accommodations framework for the current study.

**Rational choice/economic framework**

The rational choice/economic framework is often called methodological individualism because the proponents of this framework argue that the complexity of social phenomena can be reduced to the outcomes of individual choices (Blau, 2001; Scott, 2000). The focus of this framework is geared towards individuals’ preferences, rational decisions, calculative strategies, and choices that allow individuals to achieve their desired outcomes (Scott, 2000). I will now elaborate on the assumptions behind this framework.
The proponents of the rational choice/economic framework assume that parents carry a consistent preference and rank available options from the most desirable to the least preferable to maximize their expected goals (Eriksson, 2011). For parents to have a consistent preference over other alternatives, their preferences should satisfy a number of conditions, such as completeness and transitivity (Eriksson, 2011).

Completeness is important to ensure that the agent will have a preference: it says that for any alternatives X and Y, the agent either prefers X to Y, Y to X, or is indifferent between them. Transitivity is important to ensure that the preferences make sense: if an agent prefers X over Y and Y over Z, he or she also prefers X over Z (Eriksson, 2011, p. 17).

According to this framework, parents should supposedly have complete knowledge of their available options and preferences. By ranking their preferences, scholars from rational theory assert that the parents should be able to have the highest preferences and transfer to the second preference if the highest preference is unavailable to choose. For this reason, the scholars of this theory believe that knowing all options and preferences allows parents to make a full cost-benefit analysis to maximize their satisfaction. In addition, these scholars focus on understanding parents’ tradeoffs among the preferability of alternative options and the outcome of a choice with given constraints (i.e., time and budget). This can be observed in many childcare studies examining the type of childcare parents would choose with changes in factors, such as income, employment, and the quality of alternative options (Kim & Liu, 2021; Zangger & Widmer, 2020; Morrissey, 2008).

In addition, proponents of the rational choice/economic framework assume that parents carry relatively fixed, a priori preferences for their individual choices. Following the logic of this framework, parents’ values always remain a given (Heath, 1976; Scott, 2000) so that all parents’ preferences are then similar. Therefore, rational choice scholars assume that parents prefer high-
quality factors that experts prefer because they argue that “quality can be represented by a single index” such as existing quality tools (e.g., Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)). For this reason, it is simple to measure quality and provide parents with information on a set of quality factors. Parents do not have to “[place] the same weight on quality in their preferences” but need to “agree on what constitutes quality” (Blau, 2001, p. 53). This can be a reason that scholars research how the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) can support parents’ enrollment of their children in high-quality childcare (Bassok et al., 2018b; Bassok et al., 2019; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008; Herbst, 2018); and parents’ supposed lack of knowledge about quality has a negative effect on children’s learning (Sabol et al., 2013).

The logic of the QRIS is quite simple. The scholars of this framework argue that the supply of quality childcare depends on parents’ demand for high-quality childcare (Blau, 2001) because parents’ incomplete knowledge about childcare quality will result in poor choice and market failure. However, if parents prefer and choose high-quality childcare, it will lead to market success where childcare providers keep improving their quality to survive in the childcare market. This is the reason why parents are expected to make choices using an informed assessment of goods and services according to this framework. When they select the most desired, highest quality options, this will allow the childcare market to have a larger, high-quality pool (Zellman & Perlman, 2006) because “an increase in the market reward to quality causes the provider to increase the quality of care, by hiring more skilled labor or upgrading the skills of existing staff” (Blau, 2001, p. 56). From this perspective, it is then the parents’ problem if they

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6 QRIS often include structural quality for the regulation and licensure purposes. It lists high-quality components and ratings of childcare centers. It aims to educate parents about the quality of childcare and select the most desired, highest quality options.
do not have accurate and perfect information for making their rational choices (Chaudry et al., 2010; Meyers & Jordan, 2006).

In addition, the scholars using this framework assert that “any level of quality is available to be purchased in the market if the family is willing to pay the market price for the desired level of quality” (Blau, 2001, p. 52). This assumption results from their assumption that parents are willing to pay the market price to increase their satisfaction in using high-quality childcare (Blau, 2001). Therefore, it is up to the parents whether they choose high-quality care that is usually expensive, meaning that parents-reported lack of childcare supply is not due to market failure but due to the parent’s purposive choice. Also, the proponents of this framework assume that parents do not choose informal care because it is low-quality rather than because it is unavailable (Blau, 2001). Thus, in this framework, parents should take responsibility to discern and choose high-quality childcare.

**Accommodations framework**

Meyers and Jordan (2006) assert that parents’ childcare decisions are not as simple as the scholars in the rational choice/economic framework make them out to be due to “the complexity, multiple determinants, and fluidity of childcare decisions” (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 21). Parents’ decision-making is complex because parents’ childcare decisions are the result of the family's accommodations to their contextualized preferences, rather than an entirely individual choice (Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Chaudry et al., 2010). The proponents of this framework claim that families make childcare decisions by accommodating contextual factors, like preferences and beliefs, information, childcare supply, and resources (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Thus, parents’ decision-making processes are complex and dynamic, and may not always be predictable.
The researchers in this framework assume that parents’ decision-making processes depend on the entire family’s life trajectories and contexts. All their actions have meanings and history because they are the outcomes of individuals acting within social and institutional contexts, such as workplaces, schools, households, childcare centers, and neighborhoods (Chaudry et al., 2010). This means that their preferences can change as their child gets older and as changes occur in their neighborhoods, workplaces, economic situations, social networks, or family structures over time (Chaudry et al., 2010). Their contextual factors are beyond a particular time and space, meaning that families’ strategies are dependent on the “timing, duration, and sequence within the family cycle and life course of the individual” (Moen & Wethington, 1992, p. 245, cited in Chaudry et al., 2010).

The followers of this framework recognize that parents do not always make fully informed, comprehensively reasoned, and reflective decisions. The reason is that parents make purposive decisions by using “cognitive shortcuts” (e.g., use of readily available information, judgment based on their values, and status quo bias) to simplify their search strategies and rationalize their decisions (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 27). Thus, parents pay more attention to “what they know about different childcare arrangements and providers based on their own experiences, what friends tell them about the kinds of childcare they use, or what is salient in their community” even if there is high-quality childcare information available (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 12). In addition, rather than equally considering the costs and benefits of childcare quality, parents make judgments about a particular quality component based on their values (Chaudry et al., 2010). This means that parents may not agree on measured high-quality components in QRIS even though those components might be defined by experts as high-quality. Also, the scholars of this framework assume that parents tend to prefer and cherish what they
already have instead of actively seeking objectively high-quality care (Chaudry et al., 2010). Therefore, parents select what they perceive as optimal considering their situation. For these reasons, parents’ decision-making processes are not linear.

Moreover, parents make decisions by gaining information from their social networks or groups that share similar societal norms, values, and contexts. Therefore, depending on their social networks, the ways in which they gain information, employ search strategies, and navigate life experiences might be different (Chaudry et al., 2010). This is because information about childcare might be filtered through their social networks’ norms or beliefs. In this sense, the proponents of this framework view parents’ preferences about quality as fluid and reflective of their contexts, resources, and constraints. As a result, the information parents get gives them multiple perspectives on acceptable or appropriate quality (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Also, parents may trust the information that their social network provides without any doubt or may calculate the costs and benefits of breaking the social norms of their social network when making decisions (Chaudry et al., 2010). As a result, social networks are considered to be “resources and […] mediators of opportunity and constraint” in the accommodations framework (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 23).

Furthermore, parents’ social networks can be responsible for the socio-economic stratification of childcare arrangements because social networks and resources often depend on socio-economic status and provide various opportunities and constraints (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Therefore, families’ perceived available options vary depending on what their social networks, economic resources, and values afford or limit (Chaudry et al., 2010; Ansari et al., 2018; Meyers & Jordan, 2006). For this reason, the accommodations framework is well suited to
explain disparities in families’ access to affordable high-quality childcare and information with particular attention to their life contexts.

Child care opportunities and constraints are distributed unevenly across parents with different financial and other resources. Even among parents with similar economic resources, feasible options vary depending on the expectations and opportunities provided through social networks and the resources - such as local supply of formal, regulated care - to which they have access (Chaudry et al., 2010, p. 64).

Parents’ opportunities and constraints can vary depending on their life contexts. Also, parents make decisions with multiple constraints, including cost, time, supply, and information, which depend on the family’s resources and contexts (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Therefore, parents’ limited access to resources (e.g., financial resources and social networks) may create more constraints in their search for childcare than opportunities. For this reason, “accommodations [to family’s contextual factors] serve as powerful engines for continued socio-economic stratification of childcare arrangements in the United States” (Meyers & Jordan, 2006, p. 64).

**Rationales**

I adopt the accommodations framework for the current study because it acknowledges that parents’ decision-making processes depend on the entire family’s life trajectories and contexts. This allows me to view PreK decision-making as a context-embedded, suboptimal action reflecting different psychological, social, and structural factors. Following the views of the proponents of this framework, I, therefore, consider childcare and PreK decisions as accommodations to socio-culturally constructed preferences, resources including information, and supply rather than an entirely individual, isolated choice (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). In other words, parents’ PreK decisions result from a combination of accommodations to their family’s life and choice that takes into account family-dependent factors. I recognize that family contextual factors may support and limit their PreK decisions (Chaudry et al., 2010) because
families’ economically based social networks and other resources play a key role in accessibility. The accommodations framework is well suited for examining the socio-economic stratification of PreK arrangements (Chaudry et al., 2010; Meyers & Jordan, 2006) and accessibility.

Given my interest in a contextual understanding of PreK decision-making, the rational choice/economic framework is not used in the current study. Because the proponents of this framework assume that parents carry relatively fixed, a priori preferences, it cannot explain how parents’ value-added preferences are shaped by their contextual factors and how it affects their decision-making processes in which they need to navigate their multiple roles in social realities, social norms, and beliefs (Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Chaudry et al., 2010). Further, the rational choice/economic framework mainly focuses on the outcome of a choice made with given constraints, namely time and budget, rather than the process (Chaudry et al., 2010). Moreover, the rational choice/economic framework is far from perfect for this study because the proponents of this framework assume that parents make fully informed, rational decisions and select the highest quality option using accurate, complete, and objective information (e.g., QRIS) to maximize their satisfaction (Scott, 2000; Blau, 2001). However, parents may prefer information that is not in the QRIS (e.g., location, costs, hours, and educational philosophy of the school) to guide their decision-making (Chase & Valorose, 2010), even if official quality ratings are available through QRIS. What’s more, elementary-based PreK does not participate in the QRIS. Therefore, I argue that it is necessary to consider how parents make decisions based on “what information comes to mind” and what information is available from their social ties (Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Chaudry et al., 2010, pp. 12-13).

Overview of Dissertation
The dissertation consists of 10 chapters. The first chapter introduces the dissertation and the theoretical framework used in this study. In the introduction, I explain why it is important to study parents’ PreK decision-making, how I approach this study methodologically, and why it is appropriate to employ a comparative case study. I then explain the theoretical frameworks that scholars use when examining parental childcare and PreK decisions. This is followed by the reasons that I chose the accommodations theoretical framework for the current study.

Chapter 2 includes contextual information about PreK in the U.S. and 4K in Wisconsin. Not only do I talk about why equitable access to quality PreK is important, but I also explain why parental PreK decision-making might not have been spotlighted in the existing literature. In addition, I explain 4K in Wisconsin to provide contextualized information about a universal 4K program studied in this dissertation. This is also to foreground the subsequent chapters such as methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

Chapter 3 is a literature review. I provide relevant findings from the literature review to inform the current study. The topics I cover include the following: quality and accessibility, tensions between early childhood education and the K-12 system, readiness, and parents’ childcare and PreK decision-making. This will help to understand what has been studied in the existing literature and how my dissertation can contribute to the field. The findings of the literature review will also help to better understand the analysis of my dissertation.

In Chapter 4, I explain the methodology and methods I used for the current study. I provide detailed descriptions of research purposes, research questions, and a broader study which the data of the current study came out from. I also describe the reasons why I used a qualitative, comparative case study in the examination of parental 4K decision-making. I expect this case study to help to understand how 4K enrollment processes were experienced by parents who
selected different types of 4K or opted out of 4K within the Madison Metropolitan School District’s universal 4K system. The case study will allow us to understand how and why the parents enrolled their children in different types of 4K or opted out of 4K. It will also help us to understand parents’ notions of quality and accessibility in each case. Finally, I explain how I dealt with validity threats.

From Chapter 5 to Chapter 8, I demonstrate my within-case analysis of four cases: elementary 4K (chapter 5), childcare 4K (chapter 6), Head Start 4K (chapter 7), and no-4K (chapter 8). I present how parents in each case made their decisions about whether and where their children would go to 4K. Using both open-ended survey and interview data, I demonstrate quality components parents considered and present subgroup analysis to deeply examine 4K parents’ accessibility to the high-quality 4K they defined. I conclude each chapter by summarizing the findings and explaining the 4K parents’ notions of quality and accessibility.

In Chapter 9, I present what parents’ access to high-quality, universal 4K meant in Madison, Wisconsin. I bring findings from all four cases and discuss how the 4K parents accommodated their contextual factors to access universal 4K. Specifically, I present what types of 4K quality parents considered when deciding whether and where to send their children for 4K and how they accommodated their contextual factors to access the high-quality, universal 4K that they defined; this is explained within and across the four cases.

In Chapter 10, I provide a discussion and conclusion of the dissertation. I start by reconceptualizing quality and accessibility based on the findings from the current study and literature reviews. Through reconceptualization, I ultimately aim to better understand what needs to be considered to reflect the care and education-related quality components in 4K programming. In addition, I explain how accessibility can be reconceptualized to meet both
parents’ and children’s needs. This new conceptualization of quality and accessibility will fill the gaps in the existing literature by providing new perspectives on parents’ access to high-quality PreK. Moreover, I explain how the findings of the current study can fill the gaps in previous research on the issue of early childhood education and PreK decision-making. I then explain how 4K parents’ decision-making was situated within neoliberalism and make suggestions for the Madison Metropolitan School District and PreK programming in the U.S. This leads me to explain the implications of the current study. Finally, I conclude the chapter by explaining the limitations of the current study.
Chapter 2. Contextualizing PreK in the U.S. and 4K in Wisconsin

Definition of Pre-Kindergarten

Although PreK can be considered merely a program before kindergarten regardless of public funding status, PreK can also refer to publicly funded center-based programs for 3-and/or 4-year-olds directed under state or local education agencies (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020; Clifford et al, 2005). For a comprehensive yet detailed definition, I draw the definition of PreK from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020) for the literature review to understand parents’ PreK decision-making that could be distinct from childcare decision-making. Friedman-Krauss and colleagues (2020) define PreK using some of the following criteria:

(a) The program is funded, controlled, and directed by the state.
(b) The program serves children of preschool age, usually 3 and/or 4 years old. […] Programs that serve only infants and toddlers are excluded.
(c) The program offers a group learning experience to children at least two days per week.
(d) State-funded preschool programs must be distinct from the state’s system for subsidized childcare (p. 44).

On top of this, some PreK programs in the U.S., including Wisconsin, are offered through public schools or in collaboration with community-based sites (e.g., childcare centers or Head Start programs) under different auspices (Reid et al., 2019; Wilinski, 2017; Bassok et al., 2018a; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). Therefore, in the literature review, I consider PreK as publicly funded PreK if the literature explicitly states that they examined publicly funded PreK regardless of where it is provided.

In addition, the definition of 4K in Wisconsin should be distinguished from some of the definitions of PreK that Friedman-Krauss and colleagues defined. 4K in Wisconsin⁷ has their

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⁷ The sample of the current study came from one of the school districts (Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)) in Wisconsin.
own distinct characteristics. That is, 4K is a state-funded, voluntary program for four-year-olds. Its operation ranges from half-day, four or five days per week to full-day, two or three days per week (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). Their 4K operates in a Community Approach; 4K fund is distributed to public schools, “which may subcontract and collaborate with private childcare centers, community-based programs, faith-based centers, family childcare providers, or Head Start agencies” (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021, p. 179). In this current study, I use the definition of PreK to understand the literature on PreK and then to inform the current study about overall trends of PreK quality and access. I then use the definition of 4K when I present backgrounds, findings, and conclusions/discussions specifically related to 4K in Wisconsin.

**Contextualizing Pre-Kindergarten in the U.S.**

**Purpose of Pre-Kindergarten**

PreK is designed and implemented with the promise of addressing inequitable opportunities and boosting a child’s early learning and development before it gets too late (Phillips et al., 2017). Also, because some early childhood programs (i.e., Head Start programs, childcare subsidies for economically under-resourced families, and subsidies for special needs children) are limited to federal funds (Bushouse, 2009), the growth of publicly funded PreK was “a response to increased public demand for preschool education” for “some children [who] would otherwise attend private programs if state [or local] PreK was not available” (Barnett et al., 2009, p.3). To gain more public support for PreK for children’s educational success and for effective public investment, many advocates of PreK and scholars have demonstrated students’ improved achievement, reduced achievement gap, and retention of their achievement until the third-grade tests (McCormick et al., 2021; Hustedt et al., 2021; Watson, 2011; Bartik et al., 2012). This increasing pressure is also accompanied by the political standards-and-testing
movement in the K-12 system, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The political standards-and-testing movement has resulted in the “accountability shove-down” (Hatch, 2002); as follows, kindergarten has been “the new first grade” (Bassok et al., 2016a). PreK has then become a place where it makes children ready for school because “district leaders generalized the alignment and benchmarks that are hallmarks in K-12 education practice to their PreK programs” (Graue et al., 2016, p. 12).

Reflecting these political trends and movement, many existing studies on PreK have focused on the effectiveness of PreK to close *the achievement gap* based on students’ cognitive outcomes (McCormick et al., 2021; Ansari et al., 2021; Atteberry et al., 2019; Lipsey et al., 2018; Barnett et al., 2018) and behaviors (Ansari et al., 2021, Lipsey et al., 2018; Forry et al., 2013a) rather than addressing how to reduce *the opportunity gap* in PreK access by understanding what families’ self-defined needs are to access high-quality PreK. This study turns attention to families who are eligible for PreK enrollment and explores their decision-making about PreK enrollment. Since many advocates of PreK see it as a way to equalize access to high-quality programs before kindergarten, I contribute to the field by examining what qualities parents look for and how they access PreK. This study differs from existing studies on PreK in that I attempt to reconceptualize PreK quality and accessibility from *the bottom up*.

**Provision of Pre-Kindergarten**

Publicly funded PreK programs vary across states regarding hours of operation, operating schedule (e.g., public school calendar schedule), and eligibility (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). More than half of U.S. states providing PreK target particular “at risk” populations screening out potential families over some threshold. Many publicly funded PreK programs in the states operate with part-day schedules and through the school/academic year, while a small percentage
with extended schedules “with no connection to the additional hour of care working parents need” (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; Watson, 2011, p. 17).

Due to the nature of the mixed-delivery Early Childhood Education (ECE) system, where PreK programs are delivered varies depending on the state and local decisions. PreK programs can be housed solely in public schools or in a combination with community-based organizations to provide parents with more available options (e.g., childcare centers and Head Start) (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2019; Wilinski, 2017; Bassok et al., 2018a; Watson, 2011). Because state funds flow into public schools which may contract with community sites in some states, PreK programs’ operations could be different from one another under different state regulations.

First, PreK housed in public schools is provided at free of cost for 3-and 4-year-old children, alleviating parents’ financial burden (McCartney et al., 2011; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). Depending on the state’s regulations, some school-based PreK programs require income eligibility for PreK enrollment. Therefore, only eligible families can access school-based PreK in some states (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). PreK in public schools often operates with limited hours, which may not be compatible with parents’ working schedules (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; Watson, 2011). In addition, since school-based PreK is in public school systems, there is “an alignment of curriculum and standards [as well as] seamless transition to kindergarten” (McCartney et al., 2011, p. 117). The teacher’s education requirements and/or salary scale in the public school-based PreK system are also generally higher than the teachers’ salaries in childcare services (Wilinski, 2017; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; McCabe & Sipple, 2011).

On the other hand, Head Start is a federally funded program that targets families living at or below the federal poverty level. As follows, there is a strict income eligibility requirement to
enroll a child in Head Start programs. Head Start programs provide free care and education and comprehensive services for children whose ages are 3 or 4 and families (Bassok et al., 2018a). Because only 58% of Head Start programs in the states operate five days a week, for more than six hours a day in 2019, parents might need to look for childcare outside the program day (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2019).

In contrast, most childcare centers are fee-based programs that privately operate; parents have to pay the fee for service. Families who are eligible for subsidies can be subsidized for a partial amount of tuition. The childcare centers provide a wide range of schedules from part-day, part-week to full-day, year-round care, which can accommodate working parents’ schedules (Bassok et al., 2018a; Wilinski, 2017; Moss, 2006). Center-based childcare services can serve different age groups ranging from infants, toddlers, to pre-kindergartners.

**Situating District 4K in the Study**

In contrast to the targeted approach that PreK programming takes in many states, some states implement universal PreK where families can enroll their children regardless of state-defined risk factors. In the case of Wisconsin, universal, free education for 4-year-olds is included in the state’s original constitution: “School shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years” (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010, p. 5). It is optional for school districts to provide 4K; however, if they use state funds to provide 4K programming, they have to make it free and open to all age-eligible children in the district (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a). Also, school districts that offer 4K programs under state funds\(^8\) should provide a minimum of 437 hours of instruction per year. Districts are reimbursed for .5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) for a minimum of 437 hours per

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\(^8\) During the 2016-2017 school year when the parents in the current study went through a 4K year, 96% of school districts in Wisconsin offered a 4K program (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018).
.1 FTE is added for 87.5 additional hours of family outreach (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.b). As a result, districts can determine how they schedule those hours for attendance with some version of half-day programming ranging from ½ school day designs to full-day every other day in others. Wisconsin 4K has been expanded, waned, and then grown depending on state aid availability, political attempts to reinstate 4K, and 4K funds and grants availability. After 4K in Wisconsin underwent many ebbs and flows, an increasing number of school districts\(^9\) have provided universal 4K using the Community Approach since 2002. The Community Approach is designed to provide families with different 4K delivery options (i.e., public schools, childcare centers, community-based programs, faith-based centers, family childcare providers, and Head Start programs) to give them equal access to 4K through public and private partnerships (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003). The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), where the current study was conducted, is one of the districts that has the Community Approach. Family options include school-based 4K in their attendance area or another area, if there is room, childcare programs, and if they are eligible, Head Start. In community sites (i.e., childcare centers and Head Start), 4K is embedded in program planning. By sharing existing space and resources, the Community Approach aims to increase access for families and effectively use state funds (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.c).

In addition, the school district should provide transportation to and from the 4K programs at no cost. Children who live in the district and attend the district elementary schools are eligible to apply for district-provided transportation with a few conditions (i.e., distance from home to school or residency in a hazardous area). To explain how it works, children in the morning 4K

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\(^9\) During the 2016-2017 school year, about 27% of the districts (121 out of 444 districts) in Wisconsin reported that they provided the Community Approach (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.d).
will be picked up at the established bus stop servicing their neighborhoods and dropped off in front of their homes, while children in the afternoon 4K will be picked up from their homes and dropped off at the bus stop servicing neighborhoods along with all other elementary students (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.a).

Families in the district can access information about 4K through various websites. First, the MMSD website provides a list of school-based and community-based 4K programs\textsuperscript{10} and 4K enrollment information\textsuperscript{11}. Second, for parents considering childcare sites for 4K, Wisconsin’s YoungStar \textsuperscript{12} provides quality ratings of participating programs. Lastly, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website\textsuperscript{13} provides families with rationales for 4K and explains the purpose of the Community Approach. This dissertation will examine how parents describe their 4K decision-making processes under the Community Approach in the MMSD. Each 4K’s operation and characteristics will be introduced further in the Part II section where I demonstrate findings of each case.

\textsuperscript{10} \url{https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/early-learning/2021-22-school-year-4k-site-information}
\textsuperscript{11} \url{https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/families/enrollment}
\textsuperscript{12} YoungStar is Wisconsin’s childcare Quality Rating and Improvement System. The YoungStar measures structural quality components, such as the provider’s education and training, learning environment and curriculum, program’s business and professional practices, and child’s health and well-being (\url{https://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/Search.aspx?type=b}).
\textsuperscript{13} \url{https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood/4k}
Chapter 3. Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a literature review on relevant issues and factors of parental childcare and PreK decision-making: a) quality and accessibility, b) tensions between Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K-12, c) readiness, and d) parents’ childcare and PreK decision-making. I discuss quality and accessibility to understand a typical notion of quality and accessibility shared in ECE. I also set the scene to reconceptualize families’ notions of quality in their life contexts. I also discuss tensions between ECE and K-12 and readiness to help better understand one of the most salient parents’ values and beliefs about the 4K program and decisions about 4K enrollment in the current study. Finally, I discuss parental childcare and PreK decision-making to have a synthetic understanding of PreK parents’ decision-making, because PreK rests on the intersection of ECE and K-12. In sum, the findings from the literature review help me to better understand the data analysis in the current study and fill the gap in the existing studies.

Conceptualizing Quality and Accessibility

Quality

Quality is one of the important characteristics in the discussion of equitable PreK access. Although a high-quality program is a positive predictive factor for child development and achievement (Maier et al., 2022; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2016; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Gormley, 2008), underserved and marginalized children are less likely to have access to high-quality PreK (Valentino, 2018; Latham et al., 2021; Fuller & Leibovitz, 2022); quality education that children receive can vary depending on their socio-economic backgrounds. Our knowledge about disparities in access to high-quality would be greatly enhanced when examining how parents use their perceived notions of quality for PreK enrollment.
In the effort to identify and measure universal indicators of quality, scholars often list two quality components when discussing the quality of childcare and PreK: a) structural quality and b) process quality. Structural quality focuses on regulatable characteristics that impact licensing (e.g., teacher-child ratios, teacher credentials, staff training, accreditation, and safety regulations) (Howes et al., 2008; Burchinal, 2018; Valentino, 2018; Pianta et al., 2005). Because of their ease of measurement, policymakers have relied on structural quality measures as an anchor point to monitor and manage program quality. From their perspectives, parents will be likely to select high-quality childcare centers when they are informed about quality through the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) which mostly list structural quality components (Herbst, 2018; Bassok et al., 2019). They then argue that the parents need to be educated to pursue high-quality childcare because the parents value different quality factors than the quality elements that policymakers or experts define (Forry et al., 2013b). On the other hand, process quality focuses variably on teacher-child interactions, caregiver warmth, instructional methods and strategies, and emotional climate (Howes et al., 2008; Valentino, 2018). Process quality is a key indicator of classroom quality that directly affects learning and developmental outcomes, while structural quality plays a supporting role of the process quality, indirectly predicting child outcomes (Burchinal, 2018; Pianta et al., 2016; Valentino, 2018; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network [ECCRN], 2002). Combined, structural and process quality are considered to be the main elements of quality in early childhood education, although detailed components of them slightly vary depending on scholars.

Although structural and process quality factors are important to consider, if policymakers consider only those two quality factors for measurement and evaluation, they may exclude diverse notions of quality that do not belong to either structural or process quality. Cannella
(2016)’s question allows us to ponder this issue: “Do we really realize who (e.g., particular groups of people locally and around the globe) and what (e.g., language, diverse knowledge, multiple ways of perceiving/being in the world) are/is being marginalized, ignored, silenced, and even erased?” (p.3). A universal set of quality factors can be effective for measurement, accountability, and competition; this reflects neoliberal discourse practices where universal, objective, and identifiable quality factors become commodities for competition in the childcare market. However, this discourse can prevent our society from achieving “the common good, democracy, equity, justice, or diversity” by not acknowledging a plural concept of quality (Cannella, 2016, p. 3).

In response to the concern about the exclusion of parents’ notions of quality, some scholars add a third category that does not belong to structural and process quality (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). This is called familial quality, which includes “the program’s distance from home/work, hours, cost, […] and families’ personal or values-based ideas of quality” (p. 128). Including familial quality would allow us to take into account multifaceted quality components that reflect families’ life circumstances and cultural values and to better understand their childcare and PreK decisions (Kim & Fram, 2009; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Weber et al., 2018; Grogan, 2012; Ansari et al., 2018). For example, socio-economically under-resourced, Latinx immigrant parents looked for quality factors that are specific to their experiences related to their limited financial resources (e.g., transportation and a lack of good alternatives in their community) or to immigrant families’ experiences (e.g., acceptance of cultural and language diversity) when making PreK decisions (Ansari et al., 2018). These factors may have been most salient to them because they experienced structural barriers and their income or social barriers such as cultural backgrounds to access their preferred PreK programs (Ansari et al., 2018). Some
families may find it helpful if the QRIS listed “whether programs and providers offer flexible hours, allow them to use e-mail to communicate, offer workshops on job hunting, or provide support for obtaining resources in the community” (Porter et al., 2011, p. 15). For these reasons, our understanding of quality PreK would be greatly enhanced if we include family context-dependent quality that acknowledges families’ relative, dynamic, contextualized, and plural concepts of quality and is linked to social categories like SES and culture (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Bush & Phillips, 1996, cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 6).

In this dissertation, I use inclusive notions of quality, which include family context-dependent quality in addition to structural and process quality, to better understand what 4K parents looked for when making their decisions about whether and where their children would go to 4K. The inclusive notions of quality have not been considered in most of the literature on PreK quality and access. Therefore, my dissertation will contribute to the current literature by demonstrating high-quality factors that parents defined. This concept will be constantly revisited in the presentation of data analysis, discussion, and conclusion of the dissertation.

Accessibility

Access is another key factor in the discussion of PreK enrollment. Policymakers often argue that making PreK accessible to families is an important task, especially because not all families have access to high-quality PreK programs, resulting in the opportunity gaps. Availability of high-quality PreK can affect families’ PreK access. However, families’ ability to access depends on their life contextual factors in addition to PreK availability. I examine how accessibility has been conceptualized to improve equitable access to PreK.

Accessibility has multiple definitions. Many scholars (McLean et al., 2017; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; Karoly et al., 2009; Organisation For Economic Cooperation and
Development (OECD), 2001) agree that accessibility includes a child’s age, special education needs, and family’s income. They also add a few varied components to this definition: hours of operation and operating program schedule (e.g., school/academic year) (Fridman-Krauss et al., 2021); “availability [of schools] in all areas (rural and urban), length of operation […], flexibility” (OECD, 2001, P. 48); availability without time-space constraints\(^\text{14}\), availability of places, cost, and quality (McLean et al., 2017). Accessibility is not limited to the availability of physical space, hours of operation, and eligibility based on age, income, and ability, which is often used in the U.S. context (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021; Karoly et al., 2009). Rather, it includes a few more factors related to family’s contexts, such as time flexibility together with space availability, cost, quality, and geographical availability (e.g., rural and urban) (OECD, 2001; McLean et al., 2017). Taken together, to increase the accessibility of PreK, accessibility could be reconceptualized to be more inclusive. In my dissertation, I reconceptualize accessibility using parents’ 4K decision-making stories, which has been examined in the literature on PreK decision-making to the limited or fragmented extent.

**Issues in Early Childhood Education and Care**

*Tensions between Early Childhood Education and K-12 system*

In the U.S., the ways in which PreK is delivered vary. As I explained earlier, PreK can be delivered through the K-12 system or in a collaboration with ECE community-based organizations (e.g., childcare centers and Head Start programs) depending on the state’s policy and district preferences. These delivery modes not only provide parents with multiple options but also may put them on the spot to navigate existing tensions between ECE and K-12 (Reid et al.,

\(^{14}\) By availability without time-space constraints, McLean et al. (2017) mean that parents need childcare where they could pick up and drop off their child at a particular time of day at their desired place. Especially, the barrier of time-space constraints limit accessibility of 2nd and 3rd shift workers and those employed irregular hours.
How parents perceive those tensions in the mixed-delivery PreK system have not been examined in the existing literature, and I fill this gap with the current study.

Some of these existing perceived tensions between the two worlds – the ECE and K-12 system – can result from these two systems’ historical different purposes and expected responsibilities under different auspices; this then creates unequal split-leveled PreK systems (Reid et al., 2019; Wilinski, 2017; Bassok et al., 2016b; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). For example, childcare programs in the ECE system were created and operated mainly to serve childcare and education needs during parents’ employment hours and to play an intervening role as a social infrastructure for underserved and minoritized children (Rose, 1999; Cahan, 1989). The majority of these programs operate under the support of the federal government and/or private business (McCabe & Sipple, 2011). On the other hand, the K-12 system mainly aims to provide quality education to all children, and “each state government has been delegated the authority by the U.S. Constitution (10th Amendment) to assume responsibility for the education of its citizens” (McCabe & Sipple, 2011, p. 4). The tensions created by the two systems’ different purposes and expected responsibilities are often paraphrased as “public and private, system and nonsystem, caregiving and education, and home versus institutional care” (McCabe & Sipple, 2011, p. 2). In fact, many people perceive that the ECE system is responsible for care as a private responsibility, whereas the K-12 system is responsible for education as a public responsibility (Schaack et al., 2012; Morrissey & Warner, 2007).

Despite the fact that the ECE and K-12 system were developed with different purposes, expectations, and governance, their boundaries have been blurred with an increase in women’s employment rates and emphasis on education during the early years for closing the opportunity
gap (Glynn et al., May 8, 2013; Morrissey, February 18, 2020). PreK, regardless of where it operates, has been perceived to implicitly take a role in merging childcare and education needs. Yet, many part-day, school-based PreK programs focus on a child’s developmental needs and education but do not provide wrap-around care which reflects working parents’ childcare needs (Barnett et al., 2009). Therefore, although PreK attempts to bring these two seemingly different systems together, various PreK operations under different auspices may prevent the public from seeing PreK in its entirety. This makes the boundaries between care and education even sharper even though PreK aims to provide both quality care and education to children (Schaack et al., 2012; Folbre, 2001; Lakoff & Grady, 1998; Morrissey & Warner, 2007). Yet, PreK brings historical tensions between the two worlds - the ECE and K-12 system - to the forefront while serving as a bridge between them. Since existing studies on PreK decision-making mostly examined socio-economically under-resourced and employed parents’ PreK enrollment (Johnson et al., 2017; Barbarin et al., 2006), my dissertation will fill the gap by examining how parents’ employment across all class affects PreK access. This will help to understand why care and education should be considered together to increase PreK accessibility.

Another prominent tension in the ECE and K-12 system has to do with the teaching philosophies – Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and standards-based learning. Specifically, DAP in ECE emphasizes individual children’s multiple assets, child-centered integrated learning, and play-based approaches where children’s developmental domains (e.g., physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being) are promoted (NAEYC, n.d.a; McCabe & Sipple, 2011; Graue, 2008). Educators valuing DAP are expected to promote children’s learning and development by considering the needs and cultures of individual children aged from birth to eight (NAEYC,n.d.b; n.d.c). In addition, standards-based learning in the K-12 system reflects
common knowledge and skills that are considered as milestones for children to achieve by a particular age and grade (McCabe & Sipple, 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

These two different teaching philosophies can get along with each other like water and oil in practice because educators often consider the two as “either/or and in opposition to each other” (McCabe & Sipple, 2011, p. 8; Graue et al., 2018; Lynch, 2015; Goldstein, 2007). This can leave us with a less full understanding of teaching and learning in PreK (Graue, 2008) because both teaching philosophies are crucial for promoting individual children’s learning. This can also set up some teachers to negotiate tensions between play-based learning emphasized in DAP and academic content learning underscored in standards-based learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Parents’ beliefs about play and learning partially reflect these tensions (Kane, 2016; LaForett & Mendez, 2016; Fogle & Mendez, 2006). However, very few studies have examined parents’ sense-making of the tensions between the two different teaching philosophies. Also, none of the literature on PreK decision-making has examined parents’ negotiations of the tension for their children’s PreK enrollment. Therefore, I will contribute to the field by examining how parents perceive the tensions and use them when enrolling their children in 4K provided in public schools and community sites.

**Readiness**

Readiness is a popular term used in the field of early childhood education. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) (1997) has suggested five dimensions of readiness: cognition and general knowledge, language development, approaches toward learning, social and emotional development, and physical well-being and motor development. Yet, readiness is often defined as school readiness which includes a set of skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students need to possess before kindergarten or school entry (Manfra, 2019; Ohle & Harvey, 2019). This
commonly used definition, ‘school readiness’, is often taken for granted by the public so that the public might miss out on an opportunity to realize that school readiness is merely one of the concepts of readiness. The term, ‘school readiness’, might also have prevented policymakers from figuring out how ECE can be better supported by the school’s collaborative efforts with ECE for children rather than figuring out how ECE can prepare children for school (Kaga et al., 2010).

The term ‘readiness’ lacks consensus in that the meaning of readiness can vary depending on one’s theoretical approach. Four perspectives on the concept of readiness show us how readiness can be taken up by the public and determined by their views on how children develop readiness. The four perspectives include idealism/nativism, empiricism/environmentalism, social constructivism, and interactionism (Meisels, 1999).

From the perspective of an idealist/nativist, children’s internal clock will lead them to reach a level of maturity (Meisels, 1999). Therefore, rather than emphasizing the influence of the environment, the idealists/nativists argue that time will naturally make children ready to learn and develop on their own. This perspective can be seen when parents delay their child’s kindergarten entry so that they will be the oldest in the kindergarten the following year (e.g., children having summer birthdays right before the cut-off date) (Greenburg & Winsler, 2020; Hanly et al., 2019; Mergler & Walker, 2017; Bassok & Reardon, 2013; Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Graue et al., 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2009). Also, parents’ decisions on redshirting depend on how they perceive their child’s skills and knowledge. Specifically, redshirting can relate to how children’s social and emotional competencies are framed by parents. For example, parents redshirt their children if they perceive that their children have immature social-emotional skills despite their strong academic skills (Graue et al., 2002). In addition, redshirting is more found in
boys and higher-income families (Greenburg & Winsler, 2020; Hanly et al., 2019; Mergler & Walker, 2017; Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Likewise, from this perspective, the problem of not being ready to learn lies within a child (e.g., size, stamina, and social skills) (Graue et al., 2003; Noel & Newman, 2003; Meisels, 1999).

Empiricists argue that readiness can be developed through teacher and school support (Meisels, 1999). Even if a child is unready, readiness can be developed if the teachers focus on teaching knowledge and skills. In this sense, the empiricists see readiness as amenable to forces outside the child. This perspective can be easily found when children come to kindergarten or school well prepared with a set of school-based skills with teacher or parent support (Brinkley et al., 2022; Sonnenschein et al., 2016; Meisels, 1999; Hatcher et al., 2012; Barbarin et al., 2008). This perspective can be also found in the studies on PreK access and effectiveness that focus on examining how PreK can prepare children with an expected skill set for school success in later grades (Atteberry et al., 2019; Lipsey et al., 2018; Barnett et al., 2018).

Lastly, the final perspectives are social constructivism and interactionism. Social constructivists argue that readiness lies neither within a child nor outside the child (Meisels, 1999). Instead, they assert that the definition of readiness can be found from social contexts. In social contexts, people gain and construct the ideas of readiness through their interactions with their social settings, social networks, and community members (Meisels, 1999; Graue, 1992). The meanings of readiness therefore vary depending on people, their social networks, and a child’s attributes (Graue, 1992, 1993; Meisels, 1999). In addition, interactionists claim that readiness is co-constructed “from the child’s contributions to schooling and the school’s contribution to the child” (Meisels, 1999, p. 49). That is, interactionists acknowledge bidirectional interactions between schools and children and look at what schools and children do.
and bring to each other to meet children’s needs in children’s learning (Meisels, 1999). Therefore, rather than focusing on whether or not children have a skill set for school readiness, interactionists underscore “readiness for learning” which supports children in the process of becoming learners. Developing a mutual understanding of goals for children’s development and learning that requires collaboration among stakeholders is a goal for interactionists (Graue, 2006).

When examining current literature on PreK decision-making, parents mostly held empiricist understandings and wanted their children to have the following things in PreK: school preparation (Johnson et al., 2017); literacy and numeracy skill development in a quality environment (Grogan, 2012); academic supports (Bassok et al., 2018a); academically and socioemotionally enriching environment (Ansari et al., 2018). However, they mostly examined socioeconomically under-resourced parents, except for Grogan (2012), and overall PreK enrollment rather than by PreK types, except for Johnson et al., (2017). In my dissertation, I will contribute to the field by examining how parents’ perspectives on readiness affect their decisions about different 4K options considering all demographic factors.

Parents’ Childcare and PreK Decision-Making

In order to better understand how parents make decisions about PreK, that process is often seen through the lens of their decisions about childcare. There are several reasons for this. Like childcare, PreK is not required so their decisions are discretionary. What’s more, PreK is located between ECE and K-12 so that some parental childcare decision-making factors (e.g., preferences, resources, and supply) can apply to PreK decision-making. Especially, for many parents, PreK is used as a form of childcare to ensure that their child’s needs are met while they attend to work or other responsibilities. The part-time nature of PreK even makes childcare a
necessity for the rest of the day. For these reasons, the decision-making processes for both PreK and childcare are often intertwined.

Despite this intertwined relationship, many scholars have not paid much attention to PreK decision-making, but only to childcare decision-making. Perhaps this is because the main focus in PreK scholarship has been proving the effectiveness of PreK programs in a child’s academic achievement and education pipeline, whereas the main focus in childcare scholarship has been supporting parents in the paid workforce (Atteberry et al., 2019; Lipsey et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2018; Landivar et al., 2021; Watson, 2011). Perhaps the reason for this gap is because there has not been enough time for scholars to examine this issue because PreK is still a relatively new thing in the field.

As PreK exists in a unique position in which it has “served to bring [ECE] and K-12 world together”, studying parental PreK decision-making together with childcare decision-making will provide a valuable insight into understanding parents’ PreK decisions (McCabe & Sipple, 2011, p. 6). To examine parental PreK decisions, using a framework developed for childcare in research will enrich and expand our understanding about PreK decision-making in the mixed-delivery, fragmented ECE system\(^{15}\) where public and private sectors co-exist in partnership in some states. Also, examining PreK decision-making together with childcare decision-making will provide implications for PreK programming because most PreK programs in the U.S. implement a part-day, school year model or a full-day (dismissal in the early afternoon) which reflects an “earlier single breadwinner, agrarian society” as opposed to a dual-income household in an industrialized society (Morrissey & Warner, 2007, p. 66).

\(^{15}\) Unlike PreK in public schools and Head Start programs that are free, many childcare centers are fee-based private programs. Some eligible financially under-resourced families using childcare centers may receive a subsidy that covers a portion of childcare tuition.
**Childcare decision-making**

Scholars using the economic model to study childcare decision-making argue that parents choose their preferred, high-quality childcare. They argue that parents make trade-offs among quality, time, cost, and location to maximize their satisfaction (Ladenburg et al., 2019; Degortardi et al., 2018; Morrissey, 2008; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Peyton et al., 2001), make trade-offs about the type of concurrent childcare arrangements, quality, and quantity of childcare to maximize constrained optimization of their satisfaction (Folk & Yi, 1994; Morrissey, 2008), and pay the market price for high-quality services (Blau, 2001; Shlay et al., 2005; Rose & Elicker, 2008). In addition, they assert that parents will make rational decisions if they have accurate and full knowledge of quality (e.g., QRIS) (Herbst, 2018; Bassok et al., 2019; Eriksson, 2011). Not choosing QRIS-defined high-quality childcare is then the result of parents’ lack of understanding of quality (Forry et al., 2013b; Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Van Horn et al., 2001; Shpancer et al., 2002), which in turn negatively influences the quality of supply and children’s learning outcomes (Sabol et al., 2013). From this perspective, parents need to know what constitutes quality, which typically centers on professionals’ definitions (Blau, 2001). However, it is unclear how many parents know about QRIS (Elicker et al., 2011) and whether parents prioritize quality components listed in QRIS in their childcare decision-making (Chase & Valorose, 2010).

On the other hand, researchers using the accommodations model argue that parents make childcare decisions using broadly defined notions of quality that reflect their beliefs, values, and needs (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Specifically, parents prioritize a trusting relationship with caregivers (Weber et al., 2018; Forry et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2014), similar language and cultural backgrounds (Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Miller et al., 2013; Obeng, 2007; Coley et al., 2014; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012), or their preferred learning methods (Obeng, 2007).
Moreover, parents make childcare decisions by considering their employment demands (Kim & Fram, 2009; Weber et al., 2018; Boyd et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2013). To be specific, working parents select informal arrangements or multiple arrangements due to their priorities in practicality (e.g., location, cost, and hours of operation) (Kim & Fram, 2009), rely on all forms of non-parental care if they are working full/part-time or on center-based childcare, Head Start, or home care if they are working during regular hours (Tang et al., 2012), or use multiple childcare arrangements or change their work shifts to meet both their employment demands and childcare needs (Boyd et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2013; Skinner, 2005). Also, parents take into consideration their child’s unique needs, such as socialization, school readiness, and special needs (Ansari, 2017; Davis et al., 2014; Weber et al., 2018; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Crosnoe et al., 2016; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016).

Parents also accommodate their resources to access available childcare (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). High-income parents have more opportunities than constraints in accessing center-based childcare due to their socio-economic resources (Kim & Fram, 2009; Miller et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2016). Subsidies may alleviate the financial barriers that financially under-resourced families otherwise face in childcare access (Zangger & Widmer, 2020; Coley et al., 2014; Markowitz et al., 2014; Pilarz, 2018). This is important for equitable access to childcare because many “childcare deserts”\(^\text{16}\) are located in densely populated communities with subsidy-eligible families; even with availability, it can be difficult for financially under-resourced families to find affordable, flexible childcare that accommodates their non-standard work schedules and budgets (Sandstrom et al., 2018; Henly & Lambert, 2005; Brandon, 2004; Miller et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2016). Moreover, these families can benefit from social

\(^{16}\) Sandstrom et al. (2018) explain that childcare deserts are located in the neighborhoods where the estimated need for subsidized care is greater than what the regulated childcare market can support.
networks that leverage their low socio-economic resources to access information (Ackert et al., 2018; Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Weber et al., 2018). Parents’ resources are important factors that influence parents’ perceptions of childcare supply and affect their access to childcare.

**PreK decision-making**

Scholars using the accommodations framework to study PreK decision-making consider that the quality that parents look for reflects their values, beliefs, and needs (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Parents’ notions of quality reflect their child-rearing views (Grogan, 2012), cultural backgrounds (Ansari et al., 2018), and experiences related to race/ethnicity (Barbarin et al., 2006). Also, many working parents look for affordable options (Johnson et al., 2017) that accommodate their socio-economic resources. Lastly, parents also consider their child's needs, such as academic skills (Grogan, 2012) and school readiness (Johnson et al., 2017; Ansari et al., 2018). For these reasons, parents’ notions of quality mirror their families’ preferences and needs.

Parents’ resources play an essential role in accessing available PreK options (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). For example, the likelihood of financially under-resourced families’ enrollment in PreK decreases when there are fewer options for center-based care available in under-resourced communities (Johnson et al., 2017; Shapiro et al., 2019). Moreover, under-resourced parents encounter more constraints than opportunities as they make decisions about PreK (Johnson et al., 2017; Bassok et al., 2018a; Shapiro et al., 2019). However, lower-middle-class parents can take advantage of PreK in the mixed-delivery system by finding ways to easily access programs that are designed for poor and working-class parents (Sherfinski, 2013). Also, families from underserved communities are more likely to be waitlisted in the PreK lottery system (Greenberg et al., 2020) and to perceive the search process to be difficult and select a less-preferred PreK option (Bassok et al., 2018a). Transportation issues can be another major access barrier (Ansari et al.,
2018). However, under-resourced parents’ social networks or other platforms for communication (e.g., text message reminders) can help them access information and buffer challenges for accessing PreK (Ansari et al., 2018; Weixler et al., 2020). Interestingly, how families gain access to information can differ by the type of PreK they enroll in (Bassok et al., 2018a). This suggests that parents in each kind of PreK use what they perceive to be available or useful, lending them a few pre-chosen PreK options that are already filtered through their social ties’ norms or beliefs.

**Gaps and contributions**

Studies using the accommodations framework have provided valuable insights into crafting this dissertation because they show the complexity of parents’ decision-making and the contextual factors that parents consider. Moreover, synthesizing studies in childcare and PreK decision-making has helped me see that PreK decision-making studies have paid limited attention to how families’ needs (e.g., employment demands, affordability, and their child’s needs) influence their decision-making in the mixed-delivery ECE system.

In the dissertation, I will work to fill the following gaps in the literature on PreK decision-making. First, we do not know why parents opt out of PreK because studies focus on parents with children already enrolled in PreK or who are considering PreK enrollment. These studies also do not focus on the process by which parents select a given PreK option. Also, only Bassok et al., (2018a) and Johnson et al., (2017)’s quantitative works examine parents’ decision-making by types of PreK, leaving out the reasons behind their decisions. I hope that this study contributes to previous research by qualitatively examining how parents interpret and use contextual opportunities and constraints to research different 4K decisions, including the decision to not enroll in 4K. Moreover, only a few studies on childcare and PreK decision-making demonstrate parents’ search processes. This study will contribute to the existing
literature by examining how parents describe their 4K decision-making processes (i.e., processes explaining how parents reach their final decisions, difficulty in 4K search, and the number of 4K sites they considered), thereby illuminating parents’ needs and structural barriers inherent in the PreK delivery system. Finally, current studies are limited by a lack of understanding of how parents interpret and reflect their child’s needs (e.g., special needs, language, cultural beliefs related to race/ethnicity, and resources associated with class) in their PreK decision. Most studies examine how either families’ low socio-economic resources or race/ethnicity affect their outcome of PreK decision-making without studying how a child’s various needs are perceived in PreK decision-making and how families may experience overlapping forms of marginalization.

This study will examine how parents factor in their relative degree of privilege and barriers resulting in their perceptions on their and their children’s needs. This will be done through sub-group analysis which allows me to examine how overlapping demographic factors provide parents with opportunities or challenges to accessing 4K. Lastly, existing studies are limited in their understanding of how parents take into account their perceptions of PreK programs (e.g., purposes/rationales of PreK, PreK in the intersection between care and education, PreK provision, and PreK curriculum) when making decisions. I will examine parents’ decision-making experiences by considering their understandings of the 4K programs.
Chapter 4. Methodology/Methods

Purpose of the Study

Through the literature review on parental PreK decision-making, I have learned that parents’ decision-making is an accommodation to their family’s contextual factors rather than purely a matter of individual choice. Therefore, it is the family’s contextual factors that can provide opportunities or constraints for access to quality PreK. However, as I mentioned earlier in the ‘Gaps and contributions’ section, previous studies remain limited to have a fuller understanding of parents’ PreK decision-making.

I fill the gaps of existing studies by employing a qualitative, comparative case study. This is to examine similarities and differences in parents’ PreK decision-making processes within and across the four cases (e.g., elementary sites, childcare centers, Head Start programs, and no-4K option). Informed by interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, I aim to understand parents’ constructed meanings of contextual factors that govern the 4K enrollment process in a single district (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2018). This qualitative research helps me explore parents’ stories and perspectives, which have been excluded from many previous studies (Creswell, 2013); for this reason, I attempt to “make the world visible [...] and transform the world” through interpretive practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Research Questions

The main research question that guides my inquiry is, “How do parents interpret and use contextual opportunities and constraints to make decisions about whether and where their child will go to 4K?” These sub-questions further guide my research:

(a) How do parents describe their 4K decision-making processes? How do parents navigate intersecting constraints and opportunities during their 4K decision-making processes?
(b) How does parents’ understanding of 4K programs in different sites guide their 4K decisions?
(c) How are parents’ 4K decisions shaped by their perceived child’s needs, such as language, multicultural learning, special needs, and readiness?

Sub-question (a) will examine parents’ descriptions of their 4K search processes (Chaudry et al., 2010), such as the number of 4K programs considered, the duration of the search, the difficulty of the search process, the steps in ruling out other 4K options to reach the final decision, and the sources of information they used. This will provide me with insights into what happens in the 4K search process, what they need, and which families will most likely face constraints to accessing 4K. Sub-question (a) will also allow me to examine how parents make sense of and use intersecting constraints and opportunities (e.g., income and parents’ employment demands) to reach their final decisions (Núñez, 2014). Next, sub-question (b) will examine how parents understand 4K programs in different sites (e.g., purposes of 4K, 4K goals, and 4K curriculum) and how they use their understanding of 4K programs to make their final decisions. This will help me to understand how parents’ understanding and expectations of 4K programs vary across and within the cases. Lastly, sub-question (c) will examine how parents use their understanding of their child’s needs when making 4K decisions. This will allow me to understand how parents employ their strategies in selecting 4K among four options by considering their understanding of their child’s needs. Together, all these sub-questions will help me to understand how parents’ multiple privileges and barriers intersect in their access to different types of 4K and how they make their children’s 4K work.

**Comparative Case Study**

I employ a comparative case study to examine how parents develop 4K decision-making practices “with diverse motives, intentions, and levels of influence [...] in response to social forces to routinely produce the social and cultural worlds in which they live” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 1). It is appropriate to use a case study because my interest is in deeply understanding a
real-life phenomenon concerning contexts where each case is situated (Yin, 2014; Stake, 2006). I consider parents by elementary 4K, childcare 4K, Head Start 4K, and no-4K as four cases to examine a culturally constructed phenomenon (parents’ 4K decision-making as an accommodation) within a particular context (universal 4K under the Community Approach in a single district) (Stake, 2000). The study’s population is parents who enrolled their children in kindergarten during the 2017-2018 school year. I aim to understand their 4K decision processes during the 2016-2017 school year. Examining parents’ decisions through a case study is a different approach from the broader study and will be my contribution to the broader study and the field.

Particularly, I employ a horizontal comparative case study to “compare how similar policies unfolded in distinct locations that are socially produced and complexly connected” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 3). A horizontal comparative case study is used in this research to understand how the 4K enrollment process is experienced by parents who select different types of 4K or opt out of 4K within the district's universal 4K system. This will help me to compare how parents produce social and cultural 4K enrollment practices by different 4K decisions.

In addition, I employ transversal comparison to “historically [situate] the processes or relations under consideration” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p.3). In each different type of 4K or no-4K case, I examine how parents’ interpretations of 4K enrollment experiences are influenced by their childcare and kindergarten experiences. This will help me understand how parental 4K decisions are shaped over time and how they evaluate their 4K decisions in relation to their child’s kindergarten experience.

**Situating the Dissertation Research in the Broader Study**
The data for the dissertation research are taken from the 4K Choice Study which is a broader study of parental decision-making about 4K in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). Beth Graue designed the study to reflect the accommodations model. The study was funded by the Madison Education Partnership (MEP), a program that brings the MMSD together with researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison to conduct mutually defined problem-based research and contribute to policy and practice. In Spring 2017, the broader study was proposed to extend a previous MEP study that explored patterns of 4K enrollment, finding that 28% of MMSD kindergarteners had not attended 4K (Pyne et al., 2017).

Following the MEP study, the 4K Choice study explored how parents decide whether or where to enroll their child in MMSD 4K. I joined a research team that included Graue and Moonjoo Woo. We examined parental preferences in 4K enrollment through a survey that was distributed to all parents of kindergartners of the 2017-2018 school year. The survey was followed by interviews with 51 parents for a more detailed examination of how they made their decisions. I describe the study in more detail below. The research team found that parents’ 4K decisions are a combination of choice and accommodation depending on their contextual opportunities and constraints. Families juggle a variety of contextual factors, such as preferences for curriculum focus, access to information (i.e., social networks), and constraints in program access and family resources (i.e., parents’ employment, affordability, transportation, and hours of operation). Also, the research team discovered that many parents who use childcare 4K or opt out of 4K prioritize their employment needs, such as wrap-around care and schedules, among all other contextual factors. Therefore, many of these parents think that 4K is not accessible to all families because free, school-based 4K cannot be an option for them due to its half-day schedule and parents’ childcare needs.
My dissertation research will add insights to the Choice study’s findings about 4K decision-making. First, my research will fill the gap of the 4K Choice Study by highlighting how parents describe their 4K decision-making processes such as the number of 4K programs considered, the duration of the search, the difficulty of the search process, the sources of information used, and reasons why parents ruled out other options when making their final decisions. This will help me understand what happens during the decision-making process more holistically and how parents reach their final decisions. Through the case study, I will fill the gap of the 4K Choice Study by examining how parents’ search processes vary within and across cases using interviews and open-ended survey questions because the 4K Choice study did not examine the issue by cases and did not use open-ended survey data.

Also, my research will fill the gap of the broader study by examining how parents’ 4K decisions are shaped by intersecting opportunities and constraints, such as class, race, and gender of parents as well as children’s language and special needs, because the broader study did not take this approach. I would like to pay more attention to how parents make sense of the intersections of opportunities and constraints to narrow down their 4K options and reach their final decisions. An intersectional approach is important because many parents experience both opportunities and constraints at the same time (e.g., middle/high-income families of color who have a child with special needs). This may help me determine the reasons behind the MEP study’s counterintuitive finding that students of color are less likely than white students to attend elementary 4K, while Free/Reduced Lunch eligible students are more likely than students whose household incomes are above the federal poverty thresholds (Pyne et al., 2017).

In addition, I would like to fill the gap of the 4K Choice Study by examining how parents accommodate their views on 4K goals, 4K purposes, 4K provision/availability, and 4K
programming/curriculum to make their decisions and also how their understandings of 4K programs vary within and across the cases. This will help me to understand parents’ perceptions of 4K, the intentions that factor into their decision-making, and the kinds of quality that parents look for in 4K programs by cases.

Further, I would like to contribute to the 4K Choice Study by studying how parents use their understanding of their child’s and their needs for 4K enrollment and how they balance those two needs. This will help me to understand parents’ strategic 4K decisions for their family as a whole. Finally, I will fill the gap of the 4K Choice study by reconceptualizing 4K quality and accessibility using parents’ decision-making stories.

**Research Setting and Population**

I use the same population as the Choice study: parents who enrolled a child in kindergarten in the district during the 2017-2018 school year to capture the parental 4K decision-making processes of both parents who opted into 4K in the previous year and parents who opted out.

**Participants: Surveys and interviews**

The Choice study employed purposeful sampling for surveys and interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, to gain an initial understanding of different parental 4K decisions, all families who enrolled a child in a district kindergarten during the 2017-2018 school year were contacted and received a $2 pre-incentive to complete the survey. We contacted a total of 1,986 families, and 25.2% of the families (n=556) completed the survey. The survey respondents were more likely to be White, B.A/More degree holders, and childcare 4K attendees whose income levels were above the federal poverty thresholds than the district population. Also, families who used childcare or opted out of 4K were more likely to be White and B.A/More degree holders.
Families who used Head Start and elementary-based 4K were more likely to be Free-Reduced-Lunch eligible\textsuperscript{17}, have a child with language needs, and need special education services for their child (Table 1)\textsuperscript{18}.

[Insert Table 1]

For the interviews that followed the surveys in the broader study, it was my role to draw stratified random samples; I drew stratified random samples to have samples proportional to the district population. I stratified families by race/ethnicity to have diverse participants in a district with a majority white population and then sampled randomly within strata. I oversampled families of color to have a proportional representation compared to the population of the district. From the total of 200 randomly stratified samples, 51 families volunteered to participate in the interviews. Interview participants were more likely to be multiracial, B.A/More degree holders, and childcare 4K attendees whose income levels were above the federal poverty thresholds than the district population. Also, families who opted out of 4K or used childcare 4K were more likely to be white and B.A/More degree holders. Families who used Head Start 4K were more likely to be Free-Reduced-Lunch eligible and need special education services for their child. Plus, Free-Reduced-Lunch eligible families in interview samples were more likely to use Head Start and childcare 4K than the ones in the survey samples who used Head Start and elementary-based 4K (Table 1).

I drew stratified random samples for the interviews without consideration of whether parents participated in the surveys. Therefore, interview invitations were sent out to 200 randomly stratified samples from the entire district population. When I designed this dissertation

\textsuperscript{17} The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction define families’ Free Reduced Lunch eligibility based on federal poverty levels (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2022).

\textsuperscript{18} All tables in this dissertation are included in Appendix A.
study after the interviews had been completed, I found that 31 parents from among the 51 interview participants also participated in the survey. These 31 parents were more likely to be white, B.A/More degree holders, and childcare 4K or no-4K attendees whose income levels were above the federal poverty thresholds than the rest of the interviewees. To better understand those 31 parents’ 4K/no-4K decision-making experiences, this dissertation will reference both their interviews and related survey answers, including their answers to closed-ended questions. This approach aims not to quantify or generalize those parents’ experiences, but to better understand their interview answers using relevant information from the survey.

**Data Collection: Surveys and Interviews**

The broader study used surveys and interviews to generate data. Surveys were conducted before the interviews to use the survey findings as a foundation for constructing the interview protocols. In the dissertation, information gathered from the interviews is used to triangulate the assertions that I draw from survey open-ended questions.

**Surveys**

Inspired by Grogan’s (2012) study, the Choices study worked with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. The survey protocol was designed before I joined the research team in January 2018. The survey protocol included family demographics, number of 4K programs considered, 4K enrollment experience, family resources, decision-making factors (e.g., child’s abilities and skills, information/resources, program characteristics including quality and practical features related to family’s needs), values and beliefs about education, and goals of 4K and kindergarten. The survey included both closed- and open-ended questions. The survey protocol can be found from Appendix B.

With the support of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, our research team
conducted web-based surveys for families with email addresses, and mail-based surveys for families without email addresses, from January to March 2018. MMSD delivered a data set that included families’ contact information as well as their demographic characteristics. Families invited for the web-based survey received three waves of emails, including survey invitations, reminders, and a survey link. Families invited for the mail-based survey received two waves of postal mail, including survey invitations and reminders. Families who completed the web-based surveys received a $2 incentive, while families invited via mail received a $2 pre-incentive\textsuperscript{19} to increase the response rate (Singer & Ye, 2013). The average estimated time of completing the survey was about 20 minutes. The response rate was 25.2%, with 556 out of 1,986 families responding to the survey.

For this dissertation, I mainly use responses to open-ended questions that reflect families’ elaborated views on their 4K decision-making processes and decision-making factors. Through the open-ended questions, families had a chance to write the number of 4K programs considered, the number of waitlists they were on, the number of work hours, specific 4K programs considered, their child’s needs, and evaluations of or suggestions for district 4K programs.

**Interviews**

The research team conducted interviews from May to August 2018 to understand experiences and views that might not be visible through the survey results. The results of the survey served as a foundation for the semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol included, but was not limited to, the family’s biography (e.g., family members, employment, and neighborhood), childcare/4K/kindergarten experiences, decision factors, and suggestions for the district 4K program. The interview protocol can be found from Appendix B.

\textsuperscript{19} The pre-incentive was included only in the first wave.
In selecting places and times to administer interviews, the research team accommodated participants’ needs and schedules to include families from diverse backgrounds and create an environment conducive to genuine conversations. The research team contacted families via three waves of emails (invitations and reminders) and informed about the study’s purpose, multiple available dates and places for interviews, the $20 incentive upon completion of interviews, and options for in-person or phone interviews. Based on their preferences and availability, we interviewed 36 of the 51 families in-person, while 15 interviews were conducted on the phone\textsuperscript{20}. We conducted in-person interviews at the university office, a public space, or the family’s space. The interviews generally lasted 45-50 minutes and were audio-recorded for further analysis. We obtained permission to record before the interviews. We provided the participants with consent for in-person interviews at the time of the interview and consent for phone interviews in advance via email.

The research team members conducted semi-structured interviews to probe more deeply into parents’ 4K enrollment experiences and open up space for parents to share relevant stories (O’Reilly, 2005;2009, cited from Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). This allowed the researchers and participants to examine emerging lines of thought in-depth. For this reason, some interview questions were added or modified in response to the families’ experiences and the flow of conversation. For instance, the interview protocol reflected the 4K decision-making experiences for families who enrolled their child in 4K; however, we modified the questions for parents who opted out of 4K.

\textbf{Data Analysis}

\textsuperscript{20} I interviewed 19 parents out of 51 parents.
In the broader study, our research team analyzed closed-ended survey answers and interviews. For interviews, we developed codes and analyzed them through alternating deductive and inductive coding processes\textsuperscript{21} using MaxQDA. The themes at this stage included parents’ preferences of quality, access to information, and perceptions of constraints in access and family resources (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). For my dissertation, I will extend the broader study by analyzing open-ended survey answers with interviews in MaxQDA 2018, analyzing closed-ended survey answers that were not examined in the broader study, and adding new themes.

Acknowledging that the “qualitative analytic process is cyclical rather than linear” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 54), I have revisited the data, added new codes, and analyzed open-ended survey answers to further the analysis done in the initial study. Regularly revisiting the data and codes has helped me look at the data and codes differently, develop an emerging question, and revise the codebook (Appendix C) as my understanding of the topic has evolved.

I follow Saldaña’s (2015) “pragmatic eclecticism” to be flexible about coding methods “before determining which coding methods will be most appropriate and most likely to yield substantive analysis” (p. 60). Therefore, coding decisions have been made in consideration of “the nature of [my] central, related, [and emerging] research questions” during the analysis phase (Saldaña, 2015, p. 60). In my dissertation, I have begun with the thematized coding\textsuperscript{22} derived from the research questions, purposes, conceptual framework, and literature review (Saldaña, 2015). The thematized coding helped me to explore participants’ responses through the lens of the accommodations model. I then employed the initial coding,\textsuperscript{23} which is “intended as a starting

\textsuperscript{21} In the broader study, the deductive codes included childcare experiences, resources, structural/procedural constraints, child characteristics, setting characteristics, family needs, and family cultural values/preferences. The inductive codes included transportation, hours of 4K, cost/affordability, parental employment, and school readiness.

\textsuperscript{22} This is similar to deductive coding.

\textsuperscript{23} This is similar to inductive coding.
point to provide the researcher with analytic leads for further exploration” and understand what data tell the researcher (Saldaña, 2015, p. 101). This initial coding allowed me to have a broader understanding of the topic and understand emerging themes. The new codes that I have added to the existing codes are displayed in Appendix C-1.

The theming and initial coding processes were alternated throughout this dissertation until I did not generate any new themes. To get a sense of the patterns within and across cases, I employed code-weaving, which is “the actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form” to see how the puzzle pieces fit together (Saldaña, 2015, p. 182). This allowed me to understand a pattern and relationship within and across cases. Throughout the analysis, I engaged in memo writing practices by writing topic sentences that explain primary codes with relevant details or evolving thoughts and questions. These written analytic memos were also analyzed. During the data analysis process, I followed my “epistemological stance and goals of the project” by understanding participants’ constructed knowledge rather than trying to discover answers that exist in the external reality (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 54).

**Role of Researcher**

When interviewing parents, the research team attempted to establish a rapport by having informal conversations to gain better access to parents’ thoughts and experiences. As the interview questions involved the 4K decision-making process in a family’s life, building trust and rapport with them was important to better understand their beliefs and life experiences that could be private matters to parents. During the interview, we tried to facilitate the conversations to genuinely understand their everyday life experiences and values that interacted with their 4K decisions rather than figuring out whether their account was true. As a former preschool and PreK teacher, I have learned about parents’ accommodations to childcare options, employment
demands, and their educational expectations. Although this experience might limit my understanding about parents’ 4K decision-making, I used my background knowledge during the interviews, which allowed me to better understand the opportunities and constraints that parents navigated in their 4K decision-making.

During the data analysis and representation phase, I identify my role as a teacher, an advocate, and an interpreter (Stake, 1995). First of all, I perceive my role as a teacher because providing comprehensible data or information is important to support readers’ learning and understanding. In order to fulfill my role as a teacher in my dissertation, I selected and presented findings that could facilitate readers’ understanding of the story that I wanted to deliver to the audience. The questions that I have asked myself throughout the study are: “How familiar are the words? How similar are the experiences? How attractive are the vignettes and assertions that populate the report? [...] What to them is comprehensible? What will be remembered?, [and] What will be contested?” (Stake, 1995, p. 93).

Second, I consider myself as an advocate in my study because I would like to advocate for families of 4K children and convince readers that 4K access should be understood in relation to family’s needs and contexts. Therefore, the findings and assertions from this dissertation result from my interpretation of parental 4K decision-making and are value-laden. Further, my work will add advocating perspectives of families to the studies that mainly examine parents’ decision-making using quantitative research methods.

Lastly, my analysis is guided by my role as an interpreter who “[recognizes] new meanings, [...] new connections, [and] ways to make them comprehensible to others” (Stake, 1995, p. 97). I acknowledge that I need to create meanings that substantiate and conceptualize the 4K decision-making processes as an interpreter. Therefore, I take an agent role of new
interpretations to bring new perspectives or meanings beyond the simplistic view that readers might hold. This will allow readers to see complex 4K decision-making processes and social inequity issues.

**Reflexivity and Validity**

Qualitative researchers should acknowledge, reflect, and report how one’s identities, assumptions, beliefs, and experiences influence one’s work (Trainor & Graue, 2013). Therefore, I reflected on my positionality throughout the process to examine how it afforded or limited data analysis and interpretation. As a former Early Childhood Education (ECE) teacher at an employer-sponsored childcare center, I observed working families’ decision-making experiences and struggles. Although my professional background helps me to better understand the patterns of parents’ accommodations, I acknowledge that I bring assumptions about parents’ needs and the types of accommodations they make. Because I served mostly high-income families who navigated the system with a great deal of flexibility and resources, my insights gained from working with them might be limited and influence data analysis. To examine and bracket my bias, I wrote journals throughout the project. This will prevent me from projecting my assumptions onto the data.

Considering that the broader study is a team research project, I bring assumptions about the data that other research team members collected. First, I acknowledge that each research team member brought their own knowledge, previous experiences, and bias when interviewing the parents. I have addressed this issue through triangulation of assertions and regular discussions about the interview data with the other team members. In contrast, I believe that the ways in which the survey data were collected did not affect how I approached the data. The
reason is that survey results were collected and handed to the research team by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center without direct human interactions with the participants of the study.

To deal with validity threats, I employed triangulation of assertions and a thick description of data. Triangulation occurred through interview and survey analysis to “search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). By doing so, I expect to reduce possibilities of having biases in the analysis due to a specific method and to assess the generalizability of the explanation that I develop (Maxwell, 2005). Moreover, to better understand the research topic with contextualized information, I analyzed thick data collected through surveys and interviews. Having detailed and varied data helped me have “a full and revealing picture of what [was] going on” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 126).
PART II: WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS
Introduction

In the Part II section, I present why parents enrolled their children in each 4K option or opted out of 4K. I then describe how they mobilized their resources to access 4K which they perceived as high-quality. Simple as it may sound, you may be surprised by how complex parents’ decision-making processes are, like spider webs in which spiders weave different threads of silk to create interconnected webs that serve their purposes. This Part II will invite you into the complex, interwoven webs of 4K parents’ decision-making. Further, Part II will show you how I re-conceptualize the notion of quality and accessibility, which I define distinctively from how policymakers typically discuss these terms.

To foreground the analysis, I would like to briefly explain how I conceptualize quality and accessibility. Through the within-case analysis in Part II, you will see how parents in each case differently made their 4K decisions and how they made 4K work with their resources in a distinctive context. Despite the variations across the four cases, their decisions were united in a common purpose. That is, all these parents wanted to access high-quality 4K or alternative forms of 4K. Here, their definitions of high-quality are much broader than the structural and process quality that policymakers typically use to measure programs. In particular, parents’ definitions of high-quality in this study embrace their values and various life contexts –the so-called family context-dependent quality24— in addition to structural and process quality components.25 To make a connection between family context-dependent quality and three key constructs in the

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24 I came up with the term, family context-dependent quality, to convey that it is different from structural and process quality factors which are often objective and measurable. The family context-dependent quality includes parents’ values-based ideas of quality and practical features (e.g., hours, location, and cost), which are similar to the concept of the familial quality that Glenn-Applegate et al., (2011) explain. The family context-dependent quality can be subjective and vary depending on family’s life contexts and trajectories.

25 Structural quality is related to licensure and regulations such as accreditations, teacher’s certification, teacher’s education, and ratios. Process quality reflects what happens in day-to-day and moment-to-moment interactions and instructions in settings (Howes et al., 2008; Burchinal, 2018; Valentino, 2018; Pianta et al., 2005).
accommodations framework, I suggest that family context-dependent quality is related to parents’ educational values/beliefs for their children (e.g., children’s readiness and language acquisition) and 4K supply (e.g., 4K hours, childcare cost, and 4K location). In other words, family context-dependent quality comprehensively covers both children’s and parents’ needs, while structural and process quality mainly reflects children’s educational needs and regulation of 4K programs. When embracing family context-dependent quality in addition to structural and process quality, parents’ definitions of high-quality can be better understood.

Parents’ notions of high quality go hand in hand with parents’ resources. Parents use specific types of resources (e.g., time, financial, and location-related resources) to be able to access available 4K providing high-quality. This suggests that having multiple 4K options in the district does not necessarily result in parents’ accessibility to 4K that meets their criteria for high quality. As I will explain in Part II, parents decide how to accommodate their resources based on the supply of family-defined high-quality 4K programs.

Through the analysis, I aim to discuss the meaning of quality and accessibility for parents throughout each chapter in Part II. Since 4K rests on the intersection of care and education, it is expected to meet both parents’ and children’s needs. I argue that family context-dependent quality should be considered in understanding families’ 4K access because it covers both families’ life contexts (e.g., cost, hours, location, and transportation) and their educational values and beliefs (e.g., language learning, learning structure, and readiness). If we only narrowly look at structural and process quality that mostly applies to children’s educational needs and

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26 I follow the notions of beliefs/values, resources, and supply in the accommodations framework. Beliefs are convictions that parents accept to be true while values are parents’ ideals or principles of their behaviors. Resources include parents’ financial resources and information. Supply is 4K availability (Meyers & Jordan, 2006).

27 Structural quality can influence subsidy-eligible parents’ access to childcare centers. A subsidy is provided when they enroll their children in childcare centers that participate in the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) that mostly use structural quality for quality measurement.
regulations, we have a limited understanding of families’ decisions about whether and where to send their children for 4K. Family context-dependent quality should be the additional component to consider because it enables care and education components to co-exist. To better understand parents’ 4K accessibility, it is key to understand how families mobilize their resources to balance their care and education needs. This concept of quality and accessibility will be revisited throughout the within-case analysis. This will allow us to understand the agency of parents who actively try to meet both their childcare needs and their children’s education needs during the decision-making processes, which is usually invisible to policymakers.

The data I use for analysis in Part II include open-ended survey answers and interviews. Surveyed parents were asked about their children’s skills and development that they considered for their 4K decisions, specific 4K programs they considered enrolling their children in, and anything they would like to share about their 4K decision-making processes. In addition, interviewed parents were asked about their children’s childcare experiences during the 0-3 years, their 4K decision-making processes, and their reflections on their 4K decisions after their children’s kindergarten year. In addition to the open-ended survey answers and interviews, I also used closed-ended survey answers to gain contextualized information and better understand families’ decision-making processes. For families who happened to participate in both survey and interview, I analyzed their open-ended survey answers and interview and referenced their closed-ended survey answers to gain a comprehensive, yet in-depth understanding of their decision-making processes.

Part II will consist of four chapters: elementary 4K, childcare 4K, Head Start 4K, and no-4K. Each chapter will follow the same structure. That is, the introduction explores the case and

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28 In the analysis, pseudonyms are used for all 4K and non-4K sites’ names as well as parents’ names. The school district’s name is not a pseudonym.
context of each 4K program or no-4K option. I then delve into three different categories of quality – structural, process, and family context-dependent quality – that influenced parents’ decision-making using open-ended survey items. As I stated earlier, family context-dependent quality embraces three key constructs (i.e., educational beliefs/values; some resources related to time, finance, and location; and supply) from the accommodations framework since it reflects the family’s life contexts and values/beliefs. This will help our holistic and deeper understanding of what high-quality meant for 4K families and how it affected their 4K decisions. Using the findings from the open-ended survey items, I then briefly summarize the main story of families’ decision-making. I use the surveyed parents’ main story of decision-making as leverage to examine each case more in-depth and foreground subgroup analysis which will come after.

For in-depth analysis, I provide profiles of families and subgroup analysis on families’ decision-making stories using interview data. The subgroup analysis demonstrates how families with different demographic backgrounds experienced the main story of the case and reveals who had more opportunities or barriers to different 4K options. I chose representative parents who best illustrated the main story of their decision-making in each case. My analysis will focus on how parents’ race, class, and gender as well as children’s language and special needs intersected and shaped parents’ 4K decisions. This will show us how parents’ decisions were shaped by varying privileges and disadvantages. For example, some White parents might have different privileges and disadvantages depending on their class, their gender, and their children’s language and special needs. This rationale is reflected in the selection of families for subgroup analysis. I also used closed-ended survey answers when relevant to gain contextualized information about parents’ decision-making processes. The sub-group analysis will lead us to understand families’ accessibility to universal 4K which is supposed to be accessible to all families. Lastly, I conclude
each chapter by summarizing parents’ decision-making processes and re-conceptualizing the notions of quality and accessibility based on families’ accounts in each case.
Chapter 5. Elementary 4K

Definition of the Case and Context of Elementary 4K

The case I present in this chapter is parents who enrolled their children in elementary 4K in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). Through examining the case, I aim to examine a culturally constructed phenomenon (parents’ elementary 4K decision-making as an accommodation) within a particular context (universal 4K under the Community Approach in a single district) (Stake, 2000). To support contextualized understanding of parents’ decision-making, I will now explain elementary 4K operation, its needs-based programs, and who elementary 4K parents are in this study. This will help to better understand how parental elementary 4K decision-making was situated in their social contexts.

Almost all elementary 4K parents discussed the availability of 4K in elementary schools, half-day 4K schedules, and district transportation, which relates to family context-dependent quality. Not all elementary schools provide 4K so that parents need to find out which elementary schools provide 4K. One of the ways to find this out is from the school district website. During the 2016-2017 school year, all elementary-based 4K programs operated on a half-day schedule free of cost. The elementary 4K program is approximately 3-hour-long, and children can attend the program either in the morning or afternoon. In addition, 4-year-old children who attend their area schools are eligible for the transportation provided by the district if their pick-up locations are more than one and one-half (1.5) miles from the elementary school or if they live in a hazardous zone. Parents are required to have only one pick-up and drop-off at the same location. For families to use transportation, they should apply before the school year unless there is a

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29 https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/early-learning/4k-site-information
30 During the 2021-22 school year, ten (10) elementary-based 4K sites provide full-day 4K programming. The full-day 4K sites provide four-full days per week, Tuesday through Friday, and the hours are the same as K-5. The school district has been trying to have a full-day schedule each year (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.b).
significant change in their circumstances or they move into the district after the school year. In 
the case that parents open enroll their children to send them to a school outside their attendance 
area, they are required to provide transportation to/from the school activities.

Few parents in this study talked about the structural quality of elementary 4K. To explain 
ratios and teaching licenses, elementary 4K has approximately a 1:18 ratio (Madison 
Metropolitan School District, n.d.c). Also, teachers, who hold an Early Childhood license or an 
Elementary Education license that includes 4K or kindergarten grades, can teach 4K in 
Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, n.d.e).

A great deal of elementary 4K parents discussed their beliefs/values related to learning 
structure, curriculum, and instruction, which relates to the process and family context-dependent 
quality. Elementary 4K uses Creative Curriculum for Preschool and follows curricula that are 
developmentally appropriate and play-based. Along with the Creative Curriculum for Preschool, 
teachers are also asked to align their curriculum with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning 
Standards (WMELS). For assessment, MMSD 4K uses a) Teaching Strategies GOLD which 
measures children’s learning domains and b) Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for 
Preschool (PALS-PreK) which assesses children’s literacy skills\(^\text{31}\) (Wisconsin Department of 
Instruction, n.d.f).

Many elementary 4K parents aimed to use the needs-based programs (e.g., Bilingual 
program in 4K, Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs in kindergarten, and Peer Modeling 
programs for 3-year-olds), which are uniquely provided through elementary school buildings; 
and this is related to family context-dependent quality. In addition to English language only 4K

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\(^{31}\)Teaching Strategies Gold measures children’s social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math on a 0 to 9 scale. Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening assesses children’s name writing, alphabet knowledge, beginning sound awareness, print and word awareness, rhyme awareness, and nursery rhyme awareness.
programs, Spanish language only 4K programs are provided for native Spanish-speaking families. Moreover, parents who are interested in a DLI program 32 in kindergarten (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.d) have to win the school lotteries for which they applied. The preference for DLI program enrollment is given to children whose siblings attended the DLI program and children living within the school attendance area. The DLI programs are not provided in all elementary schools; therefore, parents need to check which elementary schools offer the DLI program.

Also, there are programs and services for children with special needs. First, there is a Peer Modeling program designed for 3-year-old children with disabilities and their peers without special needs. The Peer Modeling program anticipates those two groups of children to support each other’s learning and development naturally and mutually. The program is led by a special education teacher and supported by a special education assistant and therapists 33 (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.e). Families using the Peer Modeling program are responsible for transportation to/from the program. When children enter 4K, special services are provided for all eligible children who are in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Altogether, elementary 4K has unique characteristics on its own which can meet the needs of a particular group of families. First, families need to figure out if they need a full-time program and whether to rely on district transportation to make 4K work. They also need to figure out where 4K is provided and if they are willing to send their children to 4K in the next closest elementary school if 4K is not provided in the school near their homes. In addition, parents need to figure out what kind of curriculum and learning environment they want during the 4K year.

32 The DLI program is to provide both English Language Learners and native English speakers with a second language learning while maintaining their first language.
33 The therapists include occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language therapist, and other support staff.
They also need to gauge if elementary 4K programs would meet their children’s language and special needs. In this current study, most parents in elementary 4K considered the aforementioned elementary 4K characteristics when making the decisions.

**Families in Elementary 4K**

Before examining why and how parents enrolled their children in elementary 4K, I present who the elementary 4K families were. This will help to understand who was more likely to opt into elementary 4K. Table E1 below demonstrates descriptive statistics of survey respondents and interview participants who enrolled their children in elementary 4K. 43% of the surveyed parents (239 out of 556), and 49% of the interviewed parents (25 out of 51) selected elementary 4K.

[Insert Table E1]

As indicated in Table E1, parents who opted into the elementary 4K were more likely to be highly educated and White whose income levels were above the Federal Poverty Thresholds (FPT). The interview participants in elementary 4K were more racially diverse and highly educated but less likely to have income levels that were above the FPT compared to the survey respondents. Moreover, there were no considerable differences in the percentage of children’s limited English proficiency and special needs between the survey and interview participants. Finally, most elementary 4K parents were females, children’s mothers.

It is worth noting families’ childcare experiences before a 4K year and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range because this will help to understand parents’ 4K decision-making experiences transversally. Table E2 below illustrates elementary 4K children’s childcare experiences during their 0-3 years and their kindergarten entrance age range. These pieces of information were from parents’ answers to the closed-ended survey items and interviews that
asked them about their children’s childcare experiences before 4K. Since parents were allowed to share multiple childcare arrangements if applicable, an individual family’s childcare arrangements indicated in Table E2 could be more than one.

[Insert Table E2]

As indicated in Table E2, almost all parents had their children stay at home during the 0-3 years, while some families used childcare centers or family daycare centers in both the survey and interview. Although a high percentage of parents stayed with their children at home, a good number of parents used center-based childcare centers or other people (e.g., relatives, non-relatives, family members, friends, and neighbors) who took care of their children inside and outside their home environment. Lastly, their children’s kindergarten entrance age range was between 5.01 and 6.24.34

Quality Components that Parents Considered for Their 4K Decisions

Elementary 4K parents considered all structural, process, and family context-dependent quality. However, they were more likely to consider family context-dependent quality in their decision-making than the rest of the two.

Structural quality

Two parents considered structural quality to make their decisions about where to send their children for 4K. The structural quality these parents considered was a teacher’s license and classroom size. These parents had income levels that were above the FPT and did not have children with limited English proficiency or special needs.

Pablo – a Latinx father – moved his child from his current childcare center to elementary for 4K because he wanted to make sure 4K teachers were adequately qualified: “I am a teacher

34 Elementary 4K children’s kindergarten entrance age range was similar to the childcare and Head Start 4K children’s.
that works directly for the MMSD and thus when choosing a 4K site, I felt it was more important to choose a school-based site as opposed to a daycare to ensure my son’s teachers were adequately licensed.” From his statement, it was obvious that he believed that elementary 4K had more teachers who had proper qualifications to teach children than childcare 4K, even though all district 4K teachers have the same licenses to teach 4K.

Furthermore, Helen – a White mother – moved her child from her current preschool to elementary 4K because she believed that her child was ready to be in a larger classroom: “4K is a more school-like environment than her preschool. She was ready to learn how to make her way in a larger classroom.” Although the size of the physical environment that she referred to was not from her actual measurement, she perceived that elementary 4K would have a bigger classroom which her child was ready for.

Table E3 shows structural quality components that elementary 4K parents considered for their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table E3]

**Process quality**

Elementary 4K parents considered process quality when making their decisions about whether to enroll their children in 4K. Because they had not experienced elementary settings before their 4K years, they shared what they expected from their teachers’ instruction. These parents were White fathers and B.A/More degree holders whose income levels were above the FPT; their children had neither limited English proficiency nor special needs.

Jason, whose child had stayed at home before a 4K year, hoped that his 4K teacher would be patient and accommodating when working on his child’s difficult behavior: “My child has more difficult behavior than typical children at times. I was worried about getting a teacher that
would be patient with him and work well with him.” The process quality that Jason wanted was teachers’ individualized and inclusive instruction. Similarly, Kevin, whose child had attended a family daycare center before a 4K year, wanted to have “caring teachers and other grown-ups who [could] model empathy, being present, concentration, [and] discipline].”:

From reading primary research and paying attention to my kid’s needs and other kids’, I see that learning how to play and be a kind, curious, empathetic, and resourceful kid is more important than any academics at this age. The academics will follow if there is a solid base of being allowed to be curiously engaged with the world. Having caring teachers and other grown-ups who can model empathy, being present, concentration, discipline, etc. is what rises to the top in early childhood education.

What he expected 4K teachers to be was based on what he hoped his child would learn in 4K. To support his child’s social-emotional readiness, it was important to have teachers who could provide supportive instruction.

Table E3 demonstrates process quality components that elementary 4K parents considered for their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table E3]

**Family context-dependent quality that reflects key constructs in the accommodations framework**

Elementary 4K parents considered the following family context-dependent quality factors: a) children’s 4K/ kindergarten readiness and structure of the learning environment, b) 4K attendance at kindergarten schools, c) children’s language learning, d) availability of special education services, and e) practical features of elementary 4K (e.g., hours of elementary 4K, affordable 4K options, and availability of transportation). Unlike the structural and process quality that I discussed earlier, this family context-dependent quality reflects parents’ childcare needs in addition to children’s educational needs.
1. Readiness: Parents’ ideas of 4K/ kindergarten readiness and the structure of the learning environment informed them about whether and where their children would go to 4K.

Readiness was discussed when children were transitioning to 4K because it was considered a big step for the children and families. Many elementary 4K parents (n=68) in this study shared varied dimensions – 4K and kindergarten readiness – that guided their 4K decisions. These readiness dimensions informed them about whether and which 4K program their children would attend. For this reason, their ideas about readiness inform us about their symbolic understandings of the 4K and their 4K goals for their children. In addition, 16 parents made their 4K decisions based on their values/beliefs related to the learning structure that would support their children’s 4K and kindergarten readiness. This then informs us about how they would want to achieve their children’s 4K goals.

1) 4K readiness: “My child was ready to attend a 4K program.”

For parents, sending their children to 4K at an elementary school was an important moment in their families’ lives. 19 parents made 4K decisions based on whether their children were ready to attend elementary 4K. This symbolic meaning of 4K readiness is rather complex because it highlights both whether to send their children to 4K and where to send them if their children are equipped with 4K readiness.

Slightly more than half of the parents (10 out of 19) prioritized whether to send their children to 4K. This group of parents was most likely to be highly educated White whose income levels were above the FPT (70%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency and special needs (30%). David, who sent his child to a childcare center before 4K, was one of these parents. He made sure that his son developed enough skills and knowledge to attend 4K: “If our son’s proficiency wasn’t on par with his age group, we would have considered
waiting for him to mature and develop those skills [(social-emotional skills, academics, motor skills, and school readiness)] at home until kindergarten was the right choice for our son” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above Limited Language Proficiency (LEP) level, Special education (Sped) needs). To make a 4K decision, David, gauged his son’s maturity in readiness by comparing it to the maturity of other children the same age. Since he did not think that his son needed more time to be mature for 4K attendance, he did not hold his son back for one year and evaluated his 4K decision as “the right choice for [his] son.”

On the one hand, slightly less than half of the parents (n=9) prioritized where to send their children. These parents were most likely to be highly educated and White whose income levels were above the FPT. Their children were less likely to have special needs, and about half of them (n=5) did not have limited English proficiency. This group of parents justified why it had to be elementary 4K. For instance, Susan, who sent her child to a childcare center before a 4K year, was convinced that public elementary 4K was a good fit for her child’s 4K readiness:

My two children were in private preschool two days a week for the two years before they started 4K. Because they had the skills listed above [(social-emotional and school readiness skills)], I thought they should go to public 4K rather than the private preschool's 4K program. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Because she thought that her child was already equipped with social-emotional and school readiness, she was assured that it would be beneficial for her child to attend elementary school rather than childcare 4K. Similarly, other parents, who considered where to send their children like Susan, also chose elementary 4K because their children were ready for the school structure rather than the childcare 4K structure.

Table E4 shows how various parents, including David and Susan, talked about how their ideas about 4K readiness influenced their decision-making:
2) Kindergarten readiness: “4K is a great way to get children prepared for kindergarten.”

Since 4K can act as a buffer year for children to practice skills useful for their kindergarten year, many parents (n=49) thought about what their children would need for kindergarten already at the time of 4K enrollment. This then led them to make decisions about whether and where their children would go to 4K. Their ideas about kindergarten readiness included the following three dimensions: academic, social-emotional, and both academic and social-emotional readiness. These readiness areas can be understood as parents’ 4K goals.

Out of 49 parents, only one parent considered academic readiness for her 4K decision. The child’s mother, Francesca, sent her daughter to 4K because she thought her home environment was not conducive to her child’s academic readiness:

My daughter's primary childcare provider was my mother. I knew that there were many things my child could learn from her, but I knew that she would not be able to teach her academically as my mother struggled with the English language at times and was very limited in her own academic education. For this reason, I saw it was necessary to look outside the home to assist with this aspect of learning for my child. I knew that enrolling my child in a 4K program would benefit her by starting her to develop learning skills. (Elementary 4K, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Francesca perceived that her family’s Spanish home language was a hindering factor for her daughter’s readiness. This made her feel that her child needed learning opportunities for kindergarten readiness from someone fluent in English. For this reason, her decision was whether her daughter would attend because she viewed 4K as a place where it provided better academic learning which her home environment could not provide.

On the one hand, many parents (n=35) out of 49 prioritized social-emotional readiness for their 4K decisions. These parents were more likely to be White (63%) and B.A/More degree
holders (81%) whose income levels were above the FPT (77%). Some of their children had limited English proficiency (26%) and special needs (9%). Lily, for example, expected her daughter to develop social-emotional readiness by exposure to a 4K group setting:

I knew my child needed to form more relationships with children her age because she had neither any prior experience in a childcare setting nor any exposure to family/friends of the same/near same age. 4K would give her that exposure and opportunity to form relationships with children of her same age. (Elementary 4K, White, High school graduate, Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

For Lily, 4K was where there were other children the same age to socialize with because her daughter neither had prior childcare experiences nor socialization opportunities with peers.

Slightly different from Lily’s 4K enrollment reason, Josh saw 4K as an opportunity for his son to improve speech which could lead to easing in friendship building in kindergarten: “The primary purpose of enrolling our son in 4K was to help his speech and ability to make friends (which would come with improved speech). We also wanted him to be ready for kindergarten” (Elementary 4K, Multiracial, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, LEP, Without Sped needs). Josh expected 4K to support his son’s speech in a social setting, whereas Lily expected 4K to complement her daughter’s no previous childcare experiences. Lily and Josh’s decisions were, therefore, related to whether 4K enrollment would support their children’s social-emotional readiness.

Lastly, some parents (n=13) out of 49 considered both social-emotional and academic readiness for their 4K decisions. These parents were more likely to be parents of color (62%) and B.A/More degree holders (59%) whose income levels were above the FPT (77%). Some of their children had limited English proficiency (38%), while none of the children had special needs. For this reason, this group of parents was more diverse than parents who valued either social-emotional or academic readiness. For example, Janet, whose child did not have any prior
childcare experience, chose 4K to let her daughter further her social-emotional and academic readiness:

We chose 4K because our daughter seems very "school ready" socially and academically, and we thought it would be a good transition to kindergarten. We appreciated that her teacher still had a heavy emphasis on play and peer interactions, while still introducing basic reading and math skills. (Elementary 4K, Multiracial, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Janet felt that her daughter was ready to further her social-emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten during the 4K year. For this reason, her decision was about whether her child would attend 4K.

Table E5 shows how various parents – Francesca, Lily, Josh, and Janet – talked about how their ideas about kindergarten readiness influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table E5]

3) Parents’ ideas about the structure of the learning environment influenced their decisions.

Parents’ beliefs about a conducive learning environment for their children’s 4K and kindergarten readiness influenced their decision-making. These parents (n=16) pondered what type of structure would better support their children’s readiness and where they could have it.

Among the 16 parents, almost two-thirds of parents (n=11) used their preference for a structured learning environment for their decisions. The structure was often described as “learning,” “school-like environment,” and “opposed to a daycare.” This group of parents was likely to be White (73%) and B.A/More degree holders (73%) whose income levels were above the FPT (82%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (27%) and special needs (0%). One of the children’s mothers, Claire, explained why she sent her child to elementary 4K after using the family daycare center: “We did 4K for our child to experience the
school atmosphere, relate with different children, and start to learn in a more structured environment with a little pressure than the daycare environment or home life” (Elementary 4K, White, High school graduate, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Her description - “a more structured environment with a little pressure than the [family] daycare environment or home life” - indicates that she believed school was more structured than the family daycare center.

On the other hand, five parents out of 16 preferred a semi-structured learning environment for their children’s 4K experience. These parents wanted elementary 4K to be “play-based” and “a very low-pressure.” This group of parents\textsuperscript{35} was less diverse than the one who wanted the structured learning environment. For example, Abby, whose child stayed at home prior to 4K, considered her preference for a semi-structured environment where it had an emphasis on both play and learning:

We appreciated that her teacher still had a heavy emphasis on play and peer interactions, while still introducing basic reading and math skills. It was a very low-pressure setting that was the right balance of fun and a little bit of (non-stressful) challenge for our daughter. (Elementary 4K, Multiracial, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

She sought out “a very low-pressure setting” which she believed would provide a fun aspect and challenge for her child’s learning simultaneously.

Table E6 shows how various parents, including Claire and Abby, talked about how their ideas about the structure of the learning environment influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table E6]

\textsuperscript{35} These five parents were more likely to be White (80%) and B.A/More degree holders (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Very few of their children (20%) had limited English proficiency or special needs.
2. Preferences for K-12 schools: Parents preferred 4K enrollment at their children’s home elementary school for multiple reasons.

In addition to parents’ ideas about 4K and kindergarten readiness, their ideas of school readiness were another domain that I found influenced their 4K decisions. This group of parents believed that school readiness would be best developed in 4K at their children’s home elementary school. In addition, attending 4K housed in their kindergarten school was perceived as a plus when their older children attended the same elementary school. Also, it made their decisions easy because they already gained information about the elementary school from their older children’s experiences. However, some parents had to select the second-best option when 4K was not available at their home elementary school. I will explain how their notions of quality, resources, and 4K supply shaped their decision about elementary 4K enrollment.

1) School readiness: “My child would know the school layout, the playground, and some familiar faces.”

Parents (n=32) considered the value of school readiness to decide whether and where their children would attend 4K. About one-third of the parents (n=11) indicated the importance of school readiness using a generic phrase, “ready for school.” These 11 parents were more likely to be highly educated (73%) and parents of color (63%) whose income levels were above the FPT (73%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (27%) and did not have special needs. Manuel was one of those 11 parents. After Manuel’s son experienced a family daycare center during 0-3 years, school readiness was what he wanted his son to further develop through 4K. He said, “I strongly wanted our son to succeed and be ready for school. He also wanted and was ready for school” (Elementary 4K, Latinx, Some college, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Since he did not specify what entailed school readiness,
it was unclear about his meaning of school readiness. Like Manuel, other parents in this group considered general school readiness to decide whether to enroll their children in 4K.

In addition, another one-third of the parents (n=11) talked about how their home elementary 4K could support their children to get used to physical school environments and people, leading to a smooth transition to kindergarten in the same building. For this reason, these parents’ decisions were more on where to send their children for 4K. These parents were more likely to be highly educated (91%) and White (72%) whose income levels were above the FPT (72%). Some of their children had limited English proficiency (18%) and special needs (45%).

As a first example, Gabriel, who used parental and informal childcare during her child’s 0-3 years, made her decision based on her beliefs that familiarity with the school environment would prepare her child for kindergarten:

> I wanted my daughter to be prepared for kindergarten. I thought that if I enrolled her in the 4K MMSD program she would be more prepared for when she was enrolled in kindergarten. She would know the school layout, the playground, and some familiar faces if she was enrolled in 4K at her kindergarten school. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

Gabriel’s definition of school readiness was place-bounded because she believed that getting familiar with “the school layout, the playground, and some familiar faces” did not mean anything if it occurred at non-home elementary schools. For this reason, she believed that attending 4K housed in the kindergarten school would provide her child with a cushioning effect on the kindergarten experience. Likewise, other parents (n=10), who had similar thoughts as Gabriel, also valued the opportunity for their children to get a head start on experiencing a school building and socialization with peers and teachers they would see in the next few years.

> Then, the rest of the parents (n=10) out of 32 preferred elementary 4K because they expected their children to be disciplined in school routines, rules, and expectations. These 10
parents were more likely to be highly educated (70%) and White (70%) whose income levels were above the FPT (80%). Some of their children had limited English proficiency (30%) and special needs (20%). One of the 10 parents, Natalie, used parental care, family daycare, and a childcare center during her child’s 0-3 years. She explained why sending her daughter to elementary 4K over other options was important in developing her daughter’s school readiness:

My daughter had been in a preschool-like childcare environment with less than 8 kids ages 3-5 and doing pretty well. The benefit of 4K at the school where she would attend kindergarten was mostly about [...] learning to follow directions and cope with a larger group of kids her own age, and gain independence in personal tasks like putting on a coat or putting her own things away. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

Natalie enrolled her child in 4K with the hope that her child could learn disciplinary skills in a school setting such as following directions, coping with a larger group of kids her age, and gaining independence in managing personal tasks.

As another example, John, whose child used a childcare center before 4K, sent his son to elementary 4K to let him learn new expectations which would carry over to kindergarten:

With kindergarten being a full day, I think having a 4K option is a great way to introduce a child to school. It was important to me to send my son to 4K, preferably at an MMSD school location (he went to Fallon and is now at our neighborhood school) just to see experience in a small dose of what would be required of him for a full day in the future. It helped ease the transition from the childcare center that he spent the first 5 years at before going to kindergarten this fall. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Even though it was a half-day 4K, it was “a small dose” for his son to learn about what full-day elementary school would require. However, later in the survey, he shared that his son had to attend a non-neighborhood school due to its proximity to wrap-around care that accommodated his transportation needs. Like Natalie and John, other parents in this group also wanted their children to learn about school expectations and rules for their self-discipline, specifically in a school setting.
Table E7 shows how various parents, including Manuel, Gabriel, Natalie, and John, talked about how their ideas about school readiness influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table E7]

2) Parents’ informational resources: Parents made decisions based on their older children’s experiences at the same elementary school.

Parents (n=18) also made their 4K decisions using their 4K children’s older siblings’ experiences at the same elementary school as their informational resources. This led them to decide where they prefer to send their children for 4K. This group of parents was more likely to be White (67%) with B.A/More degrees (62%), and half of their income levels were above the FPT. Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (22%) and special needs (16%). Jane was one of the parents who used her older child’s experience to make the 4K child’s enrollment decision: “I had another kid that went to Charles Elementary school already for the 4K and kindergarten, and it was a great experience for him. Because of that, it was an easy decision to have my second kid go there as well. Plus, it was convenient to have them at the same school” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Sped needs).

Since Jane’s first child had a positive experience at Charles Elementary school, she recalled that her decision for her 4K child was easy. Plus, having two children at the same school was convenient for her family.

Table E7 shows how parents like Jane talked about how their older children’s experiences influenced their decision-making as informational resources.

3) 4K supply: 4K availability in their home elementary schools influenced their decisions.

Although parents wanted to send their children to home elementary schools, they had to
change their plan if 4K in their home elementary schools were unavailable. Four parents faced this issue when making their decisions. For this reason, these parents’ decisions were related to where to send their children. This group of parents was more likely to be White (75%) with B.A/More degrees (75%) and had children without limited English proficiency and special needs (0%). For example, Caleb wanted to send his child to the elementary school where his older child was attending. He explained how he accommodated this when he found out that 4K was not available at their home elementary school: “At the time of choosing a 4K program in the MMSD, the elementary school that my child's sibling attended did not have a 4K program. Therefore, we had to choose the next closest elementary school for my child to attend” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Because not all elementary schools in the district had 4K, some parents like Caleb had to choose the second best 4K location. For Caleb, he could have sent his child to the school which was 12.7 miles away from his home but had to enroll his child in the school which was 13.2 miles away.

Table E7 shows how parents like Caleb talked about how constraints in the 4K supply influenced their decision-making.

3. Language acquisition: Parents used their values and beliefs related to language learning for their decisions.

Children’s language needs were one of the prominent reasons for parents (n=13) to enroll their children in elementary schools that had Spanish-bilingual or English-only 4K programs.

About one-third of parents (n=4) hoped their children could practice English skills in 4K. This group of parents was more likely to be Asian (75%), and half of the parents’ income levels were above the FPT (50%) with at least bachelor’s degrees (50%). Half of their children had limited English proficiency (50%), while none of them had special needs. One of the Asian
parents, Ave, shared, “Need to consider the English language skills of the student growing up in an ESL/bilingual home.” Similarly, one of the Latinx parents, Tia, shared why she decided to enroll her son in school rather than having him at home:

No tuvimos uno específico solo que decidimos enviarlo ala escuela porque queriamos que aprendiera un poco más de lo que en casa no aprende por ejemplo que aprendiera algunas palabras en inglés, además que queriamos que el comportamiento de ella mejorase debido a que en casa es la única niña y cuando estaba con otros niños no quería compartir de sus juegos y juguetes, pero la razón más importante es porque ella siempre nos mencionaba que quería asistir a la escuela de hecho todos los días decía quiero ir ala escuela. Y ahorita ella es feliz no le gusta faltar ala escuela y eso nos hace feliz a nosotros como padres.

We did not have a specific [reason]. We only wanted to send her to that school because we wanted her to learn a little bit more that she did not learn at home. For example, to learn a few words in English and also, we want her behavior to improve/get better because even though at home she is the only child and when she is with other children, she does not share her toys. The most important reasons are that she always mentions that she wanted to attend that school every day. And now she is happy. She doesn’t like missing school [days] and that makes us happy as parent. (Elementary 4K, Latinx, Some college, FRL-eligible, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Tia perceived that there were less English language learning opportunities for her son at home. For this reason, she believed that attending English-only 4K programs at school would provide more opportunities for her son to practice English.

On the other hand, about two-thirds of parents (n=9) chose elementary 4K because they wanted their children to strengthen their family’s heritage language by attending Spanish-bilingual programs. This group of parents\textsuperscript{36} was less likely to be an underserved population than those who wanted their children to practice English in 4K. One mother, Gloria, whose household was bilingual in Spanish, shared why it was important for her daughter to attend a Spanish bilingual program at elementary 4K: “The fact that our MMSD school had a bilingual 4K program was our major consideration. We are a bilingual household, and it was extremely

\textsuperscript{36} They were more likely to be Latinx (78%) with at least Bachelor’s degrees (89%) and to have income levels that were above the FPT (78%). The children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (33%) and special needs (0%).
important for our child to enter school to solidify her bilingual language acquisition in an academic setting” (Elementary 4K, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Gloria took advantage of the district Spanish bilingual program which she believed would allow her daughter to strengthen her Spanish language in a formal academic environment. In addition, another Latinx parent, Roja, considered a cultural aspect of language acquisition:

The main reason why I chose the 4K program for my child at the school was that it was bilingual. It’s important that my kids know their culture and learn about it and that they keep learning their language for as long as they can. That is why I decided to put my kid in 4K in the school program. (Elementary 4K, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Roja thought that a bilingual program was not only for language learning but also for maintaining his family’s heritage and culture, leading him to enroll his child in elementary 4K. Similarly, some other parents in this group furthered their children’s bilingual education by enrolling them in the DLI kindergarten program after the 4K year.

Table E8 shows how various parents, including Ave, Tia, Gloria, and Roja, talked about how their beliefs and values related to language learning influenced their decision-making and thoughts about their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table E8]

4. 4K logistics and family’s life contexts: Parents’ time and financial resources related to the unavailability of full-day 4K.

1) Parents needed to coordinate their schedules and a half-day 4K schedule.

Ashley: Hours and transportation for 4K are very challenging, as they seem to be designed with stay-home parents in mind.” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT)

Evelyn: I feel we had the advantage to put our child in 4K because we had a parent at home that could drop off/pick them up. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT)
As shown in the quotes shared by Ashley and Evelyn above, families’ flexible schedules could make their 4K access easy. Parents (n=21) discussed how their schedules prevented them from using or allowed them to use elementary 4K with ease. This informs us about how non-tangible forms of families’ resources interact with supply 4K, thereby influencing their accessibility to 4K. Later in this section, I also explain how families’ 4K access was possible when they had financial and human resources.

More than half of parents (n=14) among the 21 parents experienced logistical challenges to access the half-day, elementary 4K due to their inflexible work schedules. This group of parents was more likely to be White (72%) with at least B.A/More degrees (79%) and to have income levels that were above the FPT (86%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency and special needs (14%). Whether or not these parents held full- or part-time jobs, half-day 4K was not accommodating for many employed families.

For example, Sally who worked 30 hours, 3 days a week shared how she coordinated a half-day 4K schedule and her work schedule when making her 4K decision:

We went to the next closest school. I thought it was an excellent program. My only concern is the difficulty of trying to work and facilitate a child's attendance at a school that lasts for 3 hours 4 days a week. You have to arrange for alternate transportation and alternative care, or you have to pick the child up. We were able to hire a nanny for our children for the days that I work but many parents can't do that, and I think those parents end up at private 4Ks because it is easier. That creates a socioeconomic divide in enrollment at public 4Ks. I think that 3 hours a day 4 days a week is a very good amount of time for a 4-year-old to be in school. However, given the economic and social pressure on families to keep both parents working, a better societal solution might be slightly longer 4K hours at public schools. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

For her to enroll her child in elementary 4K, she needed to tackle two challenges: transportation and wrap-around care needs. Hiring a nanny was a solution that allowed her to kill two birds with one stone. Without the nanny’s help, it would have been difficult for her to send her child to
half-day, elementary 4K. She even furthered that the half-day 4K schedule would create a socioeconomic divide in elementary 4K enrollment because many parents would end up sending their children to childcare 4K for the sake of convenience by paying expensive tuition. She concluded that longer 4K hours might ease the working parents’ struggles in coordinating schedules, transportation, and wrap-around care needs. Like Sally, the other 13 parents in this group expressed similar concerns. Half-day 4K was not perceived as fully available to them. Yet, their workaround enabled them to enroll their children in 4K (*whether*) and specifically in elementary 4K (*where*).

On the other hand, less than half of parents (*n=7*) had flexible schedules, allowing them to have relatively smooth 4K access. This group of parents[^37] was slightly more likely to be White but less likely to have B.A/More degrees compared to the group who had inflexible schedules; the two groups of income levels were similar. These seven parents had flexible schedules because they stayed at home or worked part-time at home. Mason explained that her child’s 4K experience was *easy*, which contrasted with the parents who experienced *struggles* in half-day 4K access due to their work demands:

Fitting 4K into our schedule was easy for us because of strong family support and childcare as well as the fact that one of us worked from home and had a very flexible schedule. Several of our friends with children the same age did not enroll in 4K because they worked full time and needed a full day of childcare. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs).

Not only did one of Mason’s family members have a flexible work schedule, but she also had strong family support for childcare. As a result, her child’s 4K attendance did not require a tug of war between parents’ work schedules and half-day 4K schedules. This type of flexibility and

[^37]: This group of parents was more likely to be White (86%) with at least B.A/More degrees (71%). Their income levels were more likely to be above the FPT (86%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (29%) and special needs (14%).
family support played into her family’s decision-making about whether their children would go to elementary 4K (where). Also, elementary 4K was perceived as an available option because of their flexible schedules.

Table E9 shows how various parents, including Sally and Mason, talked about how their flexibility in schedules influenced their decision-making and thoughts about their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table E9]

2) **Parents needed transportation and human resources to address their limited time-related resources and constraints in 4K supply.**

As Sally and Mason in the previous section shared, transportation and their families’ human resources were key resources for their 4K access. Those resources also played an important role in connecting 4K to wrap-around care locations while many parents worked or stayed home in this study. In general, parents had relatively easy 4K decision-making processes when those resources were available.

Nine parents in the survey shared how transportation resources influenced their decisions about whether they could send their children to elementary 4K (where) and figured out how to address constraints in unavailable district transportation. This group of parents was more likely to be White (100%) and B.A/More degree holders (67%) whose income levels were above the FPT (89%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (11%) and special needs (11%). Like Sally, Eric, who worked 30 hours in three days, needed transportation that would transport his child from elementary 4K to wrap-around care. Unlike Sally who hired a nanny as a workaround, Eric chose an elementary school outside his neighborhood but near his wrap-around care site so that his family would not be influenced by the district transportation restrictions:
MMSD transportation was a large part of our decision for our child to attend 4K. Transportation was provided from a childcare site to/from a 4K site, and that was the only way we could enroll our child in 4K, even though it meant our child would have to change schools for kindergarten (to our neighborhood school). While we considered our neighborhood MMSD school for 4K, transportation was not provided due to the childcare site being more than 1.5 miles away. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Because the district provided transportation from/to elementary 4K with restrictions on the distance, Eric could not use the neighborhood school which was far from his childcare center.

For this reason, his decision was the second best one that gave Eric’s family peace although his child had to move to a neighborhood kindergarten school the following year.

Echoing Eric’s challenges, another parent, Edward, pointed out that the MMSD bus rule could be a barrier for families to access free, half-day elementary 4K:

You asked about transportation which wasn't a factor with my last child but will be with our child who enters 4K next year. I LOVE the fact that MMSD offers a free preschool option for 4K students, but it would be ideal for all 4K students to have the ability to ride the bus regardless of whether they are far enough from school to meet the MMSD bus rules. [...] It would help close the gap between students that are prepared for kindergarten and those that are not. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

According to Edward, some families, including himself, would not be able to access free, elementary 4K without transportation, even though 4K was supposed to be available to all families.

Table E10 shows how various parents, including Eric and Edward, talked about how their availability of transportation influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table E10]

In addition, some parents (n=7), including Sally and Mason, were able to access elementary 4K due to their social ties or human resources (i.e., neighbors, nannies, and grandparents of their children). Their social ties or human resources took a role in transporting
their children from place to place or taking care of their children after 4K hours. Sally and Mason, for example, had a relatively easier time making 4K decisions compared to their counterparts – Eric and Edward – who did not have human resources. They used their human resources to accommodate the half-day 4K supply and their limited time-related resources. For this reason, parents’ decisions in this group were related to whether they could enroll their children in elementary 4K (where) and how to make 4K work. This group of parents was more likely to be racially diverse – White (57%), Latinx (29%), and Multiracial (14%); their income levels were more likely to be above the FPT (71%). Their children did not have special needs, and some of them had limited English proficiency (50%).

Table E10 shows how parents talked about how their human resources influenced their 4K decision-making like Sally and Mason:

[Insert Table E10]

3) Parents perceived elementary 4K as not truly free and affordable after all.

Some elementary 4K parents (n=11) considered affordability when making their 4K decisions. Affordability to them meant a free 4K option or the total amount of expenses to cover wrap-around care costs including transportation if the district transportation was unavailable. After their cost-benefit analysis with all possible alternatives to address half-day 4K (e.g., hiring nannies, changing their work schedules, and using wrap-around care at a childcare center), these parents’ decisions all boiled down to whether they were able to send their children to elementary 4K (where) and how to make elementary 4K work. This group of parents was more likely to be White (82%) and B.A/More degree holders (73%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (0%) and special
needs (9%). This indicates that being families whose incomes were above the FPT did not mean that they did not consider affordability.

Blake, who worked 40 hours 5 days a week, had income levels that were above the FPT but needed to think about her family’s budget and childcare expenses for two of her children to make elementary 4K work. She explained her cost-benefit analysis during her decision-making process:

We looked at the MMSD public 4K. With two children, we cannot afford to pay for two separate providers, or a provider outside of the home, for that matter. We pay a nanny only slightly more than we would pay for childcare for one child under 2 in a center (a younger sibling was born when the older child was 18 months). (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Since she wanted her children to be in elementary 4K, she had to figure out wrap-around care for two of her children. Considering the expensive childcare costs for both children, hiring a nanny was more cost-efficient. As a result, elementary 4K enrollment was possible.

On the other hand, Mark, who considered the affordability of childcare costs, changed his work schedule instead. He identified his family as a middle-income family and explained that because the family’s income level was above the FPT, it did not mean that they could afford wrap-around care costs after the half-day 4K hour:

The cost of 4K programs is remarkably important for many families who are in middle to lower income brackets. Our family would have preferred a full-day program option that did not come with exorbitant out-of-pocket costs. We chose the 4k program that we did primarily because it was school based in our district. We opted out of wrap-around care or other childcare options due to cost, choosing instead to alter work shift schedules so that a parent could provide care for the remaining portion of the day. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Mark preferred a full-day program with reasonable costs or at least within his family’s budget. To address his family’s financial constraint and half-day 4K schedule, his family changed their work hours so that his child could be taken care of after 4K hours at home without spending
money for childcare.

Unlike Blake and Mark who chose a cost-efficient option, some parents had no choice but to pay more to send their children to elementary 4K. Indeed, the free, elementary 4K was not truly free. For example, Carrie, who worked 20 hours in three days, not only wanted her child “to get [...] used to being in a school setting” but needed wrap-around care. She had to pay expensive costs to do it:

My struggle with my decision to send my daughter was because it was only a half-day program and without transportation provided by my daycare provider or the school and my work location was too far away to commit to picking her up every day to take her to daycare. Fortunately, I found a neighbor whom I ended up paying to transport my daughter every day, which actually made the experience more expensive since I still had to pay full-time for daycare to keep the slot as well as for the transportation. I think it was worth it, though; my daughter really loved the experience and was totally ready for all-day kindergarten this year. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

For Carrie, 4K was expensive because she had to pay her neighbor and her childcare center full price. Despite the challenges around costs, schedule, and transportation, she was satisfied with her 4K decision because she believed elementary 4K helped her child to be ready for kindergarten. For this reason, she said her struggle with schedules paid off. Like Carrie, Ellie and her husband, who worked full-time, also had to cover expensive costs because she had to “leave [her child’s] in-home daycare and enroll in a more expensive center to make transportation (and therefore 4K enrollment) possible.” Unavailability of transportation and limited time resources made them pay more money for childcare.

Like Blake, Mark, Carrie, and Ellie, the other seven parents also talked about similar accommodations they made to make half-day elementary 4K work. Table E11 shows how various parents talked about how affordability influenced their decision-making and how they had to put up with the childcare costs to use elementary 4K:
5. **Special education services**: The availability of special education services was an important decision-making factor for parents of children with special needs.

Parents (n=9) of children with special needs looked for the availability of special education services at school. For this reason, their decisions were about *where* to send their children based on the availability of services. This group of parents\(^{38}\) was more likely to consist of underserved groups compared to parents who looked for the availability of 4K in their children’s home elementary schools and availability of full-day 4K.

Katie, for example, wanted her child to use the special education services at the same school where her child attended 3K for the service: “My child was already attending the site where she went to 4K for speech, and we decided to stay with the same teachers” (Elementary 4K, Black, High school graduate, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Sped needs). Another parent, Alex, made his decision due to the provision of therapy service at school: “Madison School District offered speech therapy which my child was involved with in early childhood and continued in 4K until the school said he no longer needed the additional therapy” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, LEP-Missing, Without Sped needs). Like Katie and Alex, many parents in this group looked at the availability of special education services rather than considering the quality of services. Like Katie, some of them perceived schools that they had been using for services during the 3K year as available.

Table E12 shows how various parents, including Katie and Alex, talked about how the availability of special education services at schools influenced their decision-making:

\[^{38}\] These parents were more likely to be FRL-eligible (66%), White (67%) with B.A/More degrees (56%). Their children had more special needs (45%) than limited English proficiency (11%).
Parents’ Use of the Information to Decide Whether and Where Their Children Attend 4K

Parents (n=59) used their location and social resources to gain information about 4K that aligned with their definitions of high-quality. Their information helped them to make decisions about where to send their children for 4K. I define location resources as location-specific information which families gain by living in the neighborhoods, while social resources are informational resources that families gain from their social networks.

Among the 59 parents, seven parents used their residence area as their primary information because they did not think much about 4K options outside of their neighborhood schools. These parents were more likely to be White (100%) and B.A/More degree holders (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (86%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (43%) and special needs (0%). For example, Lexi, who lived in the neighborhood where elementary 4K was located 0.4 miles from her home, shared that her family “didn’t think much outside of [her family’s] neighborhood school.” Like Lexi, Ethan shared a similar thing: “Neighborhood school had 4K. That was the only consideration.” Having elementary 4K in families’ neighborhoods made them mainly consider their neighborhood schools by automatically leaving other possible options out.

On the one hand, other parents (n=52) out of 59 used their social resources when gaining information about elementary 4K. As I shared earlier, 18 parents used their 4K children’s older siblings’ experiences as informational resources for their 4K decisions. Then, 20 parents referred to information that they gained from districts, institutions, or websites (e.g., districts, childcare staff, social workers, and online websites). This group of parents was more likely to be White

39 This group of parents was more likely to be White (67%) with B.A/More degrees (62%). Half of their income levels were above the FPT. Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (22%) and special needs (16%).
(60%) and B.A/More degree holders (60%) whose income levels were above the FPT (65%).
Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (40%) and special needs (25%). One of the parents, Sherry, gained information from her child’s daycare provider: “I was interested in 4K at Frost Elementary School because I heard good things from my daycare provider” (Elementary 4K, White, High school graduate, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Similarly, Walter gained 4K information from the school his child attended at the age of 3: “Speaking to teachers at the MMSD Phonology program where my son was enrolled” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Then, unlike Sherry and Walter who sought out information from previous providers before 4K, Phill directly contacted the district helpline, which was a satisfying experience for him: “MMSD 4K helpline person was very helpful” (Elementary 4K, Asian, High school graduate, FRL-eligible, LEP, Without Sped needs).

Finally, among parents who used social resources, 14 parents relied on information that they received from their personal social ties such as other parents, their neighbors, and their family members. This group of parents was more likely to be White (79%) and B.A/More degree holders (79%) whose income levels were above the FPT (79%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (21%) and special needs (7%). For this reason, this group of parents was less likely to consist of underrepresented families compared to parents who used other types of social resources I explained above (i.e., referencing their older children’s experiences and district/childcare providers for their decisions).

As an example of this group, Molly “talked to a parent from [her] daughter’s daycare center” (Elementary 4K, Black, High school graduate, FRL-eligible, LEP, Without Sped needs). Molly perceived that another parent who was in the same situation could be resourceful.
Moreover, neighbors can be good resources for parents. Oliva said, “We had neighbors who had had kids in the program and their feedback was important and reassuring” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Oliva trusted and added weight to the information that she gained from her neighbors who went through the 4K program that they were considering. Similarly, some parents trusted information that they gained from their family members. Cara, for instance, explained how her family member made her have high confidence in public school systems: “My mother was a kindergarten teacher in a public school in Iowa, so I have a high confidence level in the education provided by public school systems. I had no doubt that the program at Charles Elementary school would be a successful one” (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Cara expressed her absolute trust in the 4K program in the public school system because of her mom’s work background. Without any objective quality evaluation results that policymakers tend to use, she simply believed that her mother’s work experience was trustworthy information for her to make her 4K decision.

Table E13 shows how various parents, including Jane, Sherry, Walter, Phill, Molly, Olivia, and Cara, talked about how their location and social resources influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table E13]

**Main Story of Elementary 4K Parents’ Decision-Making**

Elementary 4K parents’ decision-making processes were complex in that their multiple contextual factors (i.e., beliefs/values, resources, and supply) came into play simultaneously. From the analysis of open-ended survey answers, I found that many parents valued the benefits that elementary 4K would provide but perceived elementary 4K as unavailable or at least
inconvenient for various reasons. Also, almost all parents of children with special needs prioritized the availability of 4K with special education services rather than prioritizing its quality.

Accommodating their perceived high-quality and 4K supply, many parents had to mobilize their resources to make 4K work. This tells us that family context-dependent quality was what elementary 4K parents mostly talked about to access 4K. Oftentimes, parents with more resources had relatively easy access to 4K with fewer challenges, which influenced their stress levels during decision-making processes. The analysis of closed-ended survey questions that asked parents to report their levels of stress in decision-making adds more insights into parents’ stress levels. As indicated in Table E14, parents of color, who were FRL-eligible and had children with limited English proficiency and special needs, neither experienced a low level of stress nor a high level. This contrasts with White parents whose income levels were above the FPT and whose children did not have language or special needs because they either experienced a low level of stress or a high level of stress. There was no noticeable difference by parents’ gender in their stress levels.

In addition, parents generally referenced their location and social resources to make their 4K decisions. This then led them to consider a few 4K options reliable rather than weighing all options available in their local area. On top of that, their perceived high quality narrowed their options down. Parents’ answers about the number of 4K locations considered from the closed-ended survey (Table E14) support the findings from the open-ended survey that they did not consider many options. Many parents in Table E14 considered one to two options once they considered 4K enrollment; also, those who considered three to four options were likely to be White parents whose income levels were above the FPT and who had children without limited
English proficiency or special needs. This indicates that parents’ 4K decisions were the result of their accommodations because their perceptions about the availability of 4K were already filtered through many contextual factors – information, educational beliefs/values, and logistics aside from the actual availability of 4K.

[Insert Table E14]

Overall, elementary 4K parents made their decisions based on where they would like to send their children once they figured out whether their children would attend 4K. Since where to send their children was important to families, they had to mobilize their resources to address the half-day 4K schedule and limited transportation resources. For this reason, their decision process prioritized the question of whether they could send their children to elementary 4K (where) and, if so, how. I will now explain how parents with different demographics experienced this main decision-making story using interview data. This will then help to better understand the meaning of quality and accessibility to elementary 4K parents.

Subgroup Analysis

Analysis of open-ended surveys gave me a bigger picture of how parents made decisions about whether and where their children would go to 4K and how they made elementary 4K work. In the subgroup analysis, I will present how various parents accommodated their notions of high quality reflecting their beliefs/values, resources, and 4K supply to access elementary 4K using the interview data. Table E15 demonstrates the profiles of families who will be presented in the subgroup analysis. Families’ race, class, and gender as well as children’s language and special needs were considered in the selection of families to examine their accessibility in-depth.

[Insert Table E15]

Parents’ decisions about whether they would enroll their children in 4K
Parents considered their children’s readiness to make decisions about whether their children would go to 4K. When they were asked to describe their decision-making processes, they shared why their children were ready to attend 4K and why their children needed to attend 4K. Their explanations implied their ideas about 4K (i.e., 4K is the program their children could attend with readiness) and their 4K goals (i.e., 4K is to prepare their children for kindergarten). In this section, I will discuss how various parents considered their children’s 4K and kindergarten readiness in social-emotional and academics for their decisions.

Elsa, Jamala, Grace, and Samantha – mothers of 4K children whose income levels were above the FPT – thought about their children’s social-emotional readiness when enrolling them in 4K. All their children are students of color except for Elsa’s child, who is White. Grace and Jamala’s children speak Spanish and Nepali as their first languages respectively.

Elsa, a White mother whose income level was above the FPT, wanted her son to further his kindergarten readiness through 4K. In the open-ended survey question, she explained, “We just wanted to make sure our son was optimally prepared before entering kindergarten, and we thought that the 4K environment would help.” When asked to explain her reasons for 4K enrollment in the interview, she shared that she enrolled her son in 4K to earn an additional year to prepare him for kindergarten:

[John’s] birthday is in late August. We decided to hold it back one year. So, he went to 4K having just turned five and then obviously went to kindergarten having just turned six. So, he was on the older side of things, but we didn't feel like he was quite ready for kindergarten when he was turning five, and we just sort of thought ahead to middle school and high school. You never know how these things shake out when. So, we thought of letting him be the oldest kid in class rather than the youngest. So, he had a really, really great year, and by the end of it, we felt 110% confident that he was ready for kindergarten. I think he developed a lot of social-emotional skills when he was in 4K. His teacher definitely described him as a leader, and I think he really developed a lot of confidence. (Elementary 4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)
Due to her child’s August birthday, Elsa’s family decided to give her son more time to develop kindergarten readiness in 4K. After securing his time to develop enough readiness for kindergarten until the age of 6, Elsa felt assured when her son demonstrated social-emotional readiness and self-confidence before kindergarten entry.

Like Elsa’s son, Jamala also has a son whose birthday is in August; but her child speaks Nepali as a first language. Jamala – a Nepalese mother whose income level was above the FPT–enrolled her child in 4K with the hope to support his social-emotional readiness for kindergarten. In the survey, she shared her concerns related to her son’s August birthday at the time of 4K enrollment: “We knew he didn’t have these [motor, academic, social-emotional, and school readiness]) necessary skills. We were concerned that his teacher would not be able to accommodate his needs. Our son is an August baby, so he is one of the youngest in his class.”

According to Jamala, her child’s underdeveloped skills resulted from not having enough time to mature due to his August birthday. Her hope that his teacher would accommodate his needs in 4K drove her decision.

In addition, Jamala considered her son’s social-emotional readiness for his perfect 4K experience. This was found from her assumption that her son’s language issues made it difficult for him to understand social conversations and practice social skills at the English-dominant 4K school:

It was kind of hard for him to understand [English]. I think that’s it. His social skills are too low, but his academics are too high. So, it’s kind of hard for him to balance. […] The teachers were telling us we need some kids his age because we don’t have a lot of friends at that age. Whatever he learns, he learns from us. So, it’s more like an adult versus like a child. Once we found out that he has to hang out with kids his age, and then I tried to make friends, so that helps him a lot.

Some would say language is not related to social-emotional readiness. However, it was interdependent. She believed that exposing her son to social settings where he had chances to
listen to and speak English would support his social skills in 4K. During 4K, she was able to see
her son’s progress in language and social-emotional readiness:

Jamala: For the 4K, I think [...] four days is better than two days because he's engaging
with kids over there and they talk to them. I think it's more like a social skill and then he
learns how to write. [...] They are really supportive. They love him a lot. [...] 
Interviewer: Could you say more about them being supportive, that they loved him a
lot? What does that mean? What did you notice them doing? 
Jamala: For the language, sometimes it's tough. He notices something, but if he doesn't
know, he doesn't talk. So, I think they helped him a lot with that. And, giving breakfast
time, they sit together and eat their breakfast. I like that. He used to eat his breakfast at
home for like four hours, so I stopped putting some snacks for him at school, but Ms.
Dawson told me, you still get something for him so that he gets social with kids, takes a
turn, and says things.

She greatly appreciated the 4K teacher’s support which created social opportunities for her son to
practice the language in a supportive social setting. To support her son’s language and social-
emotional readiness, she also decided to speak to him in English at home to provide a continuous
learning experience between the school and home:

Jamala: He's bilingual, so that might be a problem for him because we talk in Nepali at
home and English in preschool. So, once he started to go to 4K, we decided to talk in
English with him at that time, so that he can make friends. [...] 
Interviewer: How did you make that decision? 
Jamala: [...] Because of the language, he doesn't understand once they are talking with
him, so I feel like that. 
Interviewer: Is there something the teachers were seeing too also, did you think, or was it a family decision? 
Jamala: [...] He doesn't follow the rules and those types of things. So, I feel like that, so I
started to talk in English with him at home and his dad started to talk in Nepali because
he doesn't have to deal with him a lot. And, I went to school here, so I had some
problems at the beginning, so I feel like he has some.

Jamala, as a second language learner herself, empathized with the language difficulty her child
experienced. She believed that the language barrier was the root of the issue that prevented her
son from communicating with other people and following the classroom rules at ease. For this
reason, Jamala’s decision involved whether her son needed to attend 4K to develop language and
social-emotional readiness for kindergarten.
Unlike Elsa and Jamala who mainly considered kindergarten readiness, Samantha and Grace contemplated how socially-emotionally ready their children were for 4K enrollment.

Samantha – a multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT– explained what made her worried when asked about the things that she kept in mind when enrolling her son in 4K:

“I’m not worried about academic skill-wise, really. I’m worried about social-emotional skills. With being so young, I am worried that he is a very young boy, that we might be rushing them into school.” After sharing her concerns about her son’s social-emotional readiness, she elaborated more on why she was hesitant to enroll her son in 4K:

My son has an August 26th birthday. As a teacher, very young boys have never been my favorite to have in class. They're always a little on the immature side. When you talk for days from being ineligible, I had really thought seriously about holding him back, but my soon-to-be ex-husband [...] absolutely wants Tom to start school on time. [...] So, it so happens that my cousin, who was my best friend, is a teacher at Mill and a special ed teacher. So, his wife was the 4K teacher at Mill, Mrs. Gail, and I made her promise me that if Tom really wasn't ready for 4K, she'd let me know, and I'd send him back to daycare, or we'll do a preschool program versus enrolling him in school if it was hard for him. [...] Mill fit best with our need for childcare, our desire to get up started with school activities, and my concern that he was on the edge of being too young.

Samantha initially considered not sending her son to 4K at all because of his immaturity and readiness resulting from his August birthday. Her observations of the youngest children in her classroom, as a district teacher herself, also contributed to her reservation about 4K enrollment.

Yet, once the benefit of 4K (i.e., “get up started with school activities”) won over her reservation, she set up a safety net for her child by asking her acquainted staff at the elementary school to update her about her child’s readiness for 4K. This arrangement was made because she thought it was best to attend elementary 4K if her child was ready, and if not, to non-4K programs such as preschool or daycare. This indicates that her decision was about whether to send her child to 4K.
Like Samantha, Grace – a Latinx mother whose income level was above the FPT – also considered her son’s social-emotional readiness for 4K. She looked at how much her son was aware of social practices in school attendance. When asked about things she kept in mind when making her decision, she explained how her older child made her 4K son accustomed to the social practices in terms of school routines:

I think had he been a first child, we would not have sent him to 4K that year. We would have put everything off. But he was a second child. He saw his brother get on the bus, and he wanted to get on the bus. Like, for kindergarten, I see many of the other kids in his class turn six in the winter. And he'll turn six on August 25 this year. So, they're quite a bit older than him. [...] So, he definitely is less mature than them.

She implied her initial reservation about 4K enrollment because her son’s August birthday indicated to her that he was less mature than other peers. However, her son was able to get used to the idea of school and school routine by observing his older brother’s school experiences. This made Grace feel confident that her son was socially ready for 4K.

To recap the story so far, all four of these parents considered their children’s social-emotional readiness for 4K and kindergarten to decide whether to enroll their sons in 4K. Regardless of their race, all these mothers whose income levels were above the FPT happened to have sons with an August birthday and pondered whether it was appropriate to enroll their sons in 4K. One subtle difference among these four parents was that while Grace and Samantha perceived 4K as a program that their sons could attend with social-emotional readiness, Elsa and Jamala considered 4K as a supportive program that would help their sons to achieve the goal of having social-emotional readiness for kindergarten.

Switching gears to parents who thought about their children’s academic readiness, Tammy, Amber, and Raquel – FRL-eligible, Black and Latinx, English-speaking mothers – shared how their expectations for kindergarten influenced their 4K decisions. Tammy described
Recognizing that students in the school district are the majority of kids of color. That's important for me. I don't want my kids to miss out on an academic superb experience. I want their education -- I want them to feel that education is valued, and I want them to have teachers who promote that with them. [...] I definitely make decisions based on where I feel my children are going to have the best opportunity to learn with people who are going to treat them fairly.

She valued providing her child with “education” and “an academic superb experience” with culturally competent teachers. Further, her description tells us that she, as a parent of color, prioritized a bias-free education environment for her child’s academic readiness development. Her priority in academic readiness can be traced back to her child’s preschool, 4K, to kindergarten experiences:

My older child’s experience at 4K was really wonderful, and I think that the program really did prepare him [for kindergarten]. I felt like when Tina [4K child] went into the 4K program, her preschool prepared her to go into that with all the basic skills like being able to identify her letters, being able to identify numbers and basic shapes and things like that.

Tammy believed that academic preparedness in preschool helped her child succeed in 4K. She thought her child would not have had current academic readiness in kindergarten if her child had not done 4K. She shared her thoughts on this after her child’s kindergarten year:

She is not just that academically focused. She’d rather be singing, or dancing, and she’s artsy. [...] But I think [4K] prepared her even to be where she is right now. [...] I think [4K] equipped her academically to be able to be here right now.

Later, Tammy also shared how advanced her daughter was in 4K with teachers’ support in academic learning, which made her satisfied with her 4K decision:

One of the things that I really appreciated about the teacher and her aides was they asked, "Because we know she already has this foundation, and she's already ahead of 90% of the kids because she's already been in a learning environment – she knows these things. What else could we be working on for Tina?" "So, we could create something different for her?" "So, she won't be bored in class." And I appreciated that. [...] And there were things
she needed to focus on because Tina struggled with him/her, she/him, and agreements. And she was using them inappropriately. [...] So, I said, "Can you help her with the agreements?" And that's what they really focused on with her. [...] I appreciate that for her because if those are things that can help her in 4K, she would be better equipped for kindergarten.

Tammy visibly showed her pride in her daughter’s advanced academic readiness. Considering her daughter’s advanced learning needs and 4K experience, she was satisfied with her 4K decision. She also appreciated tailored academic instruction in 4K.

Similarly, Amber and Raquel also made their 4K decisions based on their values related to academic readiness. When asked what Amber considered for her decision, she explained how 4K would be a better choice for her son: “Getting him, kind of the academic focus, getting him started in that school trumped the inconvenience of the schedule. I think maybe for two seconds, we thought of how we would do it with my grandparents, it just wouldn’t work.” Amber believed that 4K would provide academic support that her child's grandparents would not provide. Raquel also considered the academic learning goals for her child when deciding whether her child would attend 4K:

De hecho, la escuela me parece un proyecto a largo plazo para todos los niños, es decir, es lo mejor que puede haber. Entonces, tenía metas académicas para Daniel en el programa de 4 años. Quería saber si el programa de 4 años cumplió con las metas que tenía para Daniel. School seems to me like a long-term project for all children, that is, it is the best there can be. So, it has academic goals for Daniel in the 4-year program. I wanted to know if the 4-year program met those goals that I had for Daniel.

This indicates that Raquel wanted to make sure 4K would support her son to achieve the academic goals that she had for him. This then led her to decide where she would like to send him for 4K; this will be explored later in this chapter.

To summarize, Tammy, Amber, and Raquel’s consideration of whether to send their children to 4K centered on their children’s academic readiness for kindergarten. This
demonstrates that FRL-eligible mothers had a strong emphasis on academic readiness for 4K enrollment compared to other mothers whose income levels were above the FPT and who mainly focused on their children’s social-emotional readiness (Elsa, Jamala, Grace, and Samantha).

Altogether, for these parents who thought about whether to send their children to 4K, the connections between their ideas about readiness and their 4K enrollment decision were clear. These parents shared common grounds in that their ideas about 4K and 4K goals partially guided their decisions about whether to send their children to 4K.

**Parents’ decisions about where their children go to 4K**

Many parents explained why they enrolled their children in elementary 4K. Their reasons included their beliefs/values related to the structure of the learning environment, 4K housed in home elementary schools, and bilingual/DLI programs in addition to the availability of special education services. For this reason, parents’ decisions about where their children would go to 4K related to a set of distinct characteristics which they believed elementary 4K would provide.

1. **Parents reflected their values/beliefs related to the structure of the learning environment in their 4K decisions.**

   Parents enrolled their children in elementary 4K due to their preferences for the types of learning environments and curricula that were conducive to their children’s development and learning. Their preferences of the structure were phrased in terms of “actual school,” “routines/schedules,” “desks,” “curriculum,” “academics,” and “learning,” whereas their preferences for semi-structure were phrased in terms of “free play,” “outdoor activities,” “hands-on activities,” “recess,” “home-type rugs,” and “social-emotional readiness.” These preferences reflected parents’ perceptions about how elementary school structures could support their children’s learning needs. Amber, Raquel, Grace, Elsa, and Nora’s decision-making stories
demonstrate the epitome of how their preferences for the structured learning environment influenced their 4K decisions.

Amber and her husband as well as Raquel explained how their beliefs and values related to a structured 4K environment influenced their decisions. Amber and her husband — FRL-eligible Black parents — enrolled their child in elementary 4K because they believed that a childcare center would not provide a structured learning environment. Amber explained how this played into her family’s decision-making. When asked if they would make the same 4K decision again, she said,

Yes, because just thinking like there are only two options, there was a school option and there was a childcare option. I mean there is a variety of different childcare that offers 4K. So, I guess that could have been different. However, I wouldn’t have wanted him to attend 4K in a childcare setting just because it’s not as structured. But as far as 4K itself, yes, I definitely would do that again. I don’t think there would be any changes to that.

She contrasted the childcare center with the elementary school based on her beliefs about the ideal learning environment. This played a part in her decision-making about where to enroll her child. When asked if 4K helped her child’s kindergarten readiness, she shared what structure meant and how it supported her child to be ready for kindergarten:

I think [4K] helped him and prepared him for transitioning from preschool where there are no desks. It’s not structured. There are no time constraints for lunch necessarily, whereas [in school 4K] I think they get like 15 to 20 minutes to eat. So, it helped him learn even though he didn’t have lunch in 4K. It helped him learn that when the bell rings you do this and kind of learning expectations.

Her notions of the structure included schedules, routines, and school-related furniture. She explained that having her child attend preschool another year would make her child fall behind because of its unstructured environment:

I didn’t want him to be in preschool another year because it’s not as structured. Yes, they were doing letters and some of that stuff, but for the most part, it’s free play and I didn’t want him to be held back, but I felt like he had the emotional capacity to be in a school setting. So maybe if [4K] were able to give [a full-day] option or if you thought your
child was ready, they could do full-day 4K.

Because she believed that unstructured preschool would not help her child’s academic readiness, she deliberately chose elementary 4K over preschool. Her values related to the structure were also found later in the interview when she thought that a full-day 4K structure would provide children with prolonged, structured learning opportunities.

Similarly, Raquel — an FRL-eligible Latinx mother — moved her child from Head Start to elementary 4K because she believed that Head Start was not structured:

Me gusta [elementary 4K] porque [...] el programa tiene más estructura. Obtienen su tiempo determinado, tienen un calendario que deben hacer y tienen un horario que deben seguir, a diferencia de Head Start.

I like [elementary 4K] because [...] the program has more of a structure. They get their certain time, they have a calendar they need to do, and they have a schedule they need to follow, unlike Head Start. [In Head Start], they will go there, and they would just do whatever they wanted. They don’t have a structure.

Raquel’s definition of the structure included daily schedules and routines, which was similar to Amber’s. However, unlike Amber, Raquel thought that the 4K program was not structured for academic learning when asked about her child’s 4K experience after kindergarten:

El 4K digamos que era como un "Head Start" pero tenía como horarios. Porque digamos que 4K es más como el niño aprendiendo a socializar. Más no educativo. Académico. Le enseñaron cosas básicas como el alfabeto y cosas así, pero es diferente a como es ahora [en el jardín de infantes] que tiene un horario en el que la primera hora es lectura, la segunda hora es matemática. Y es. Entonces, por horas tienen diferentes clases entonces, bueno él ya sabe que mentalmente tiene que adaptarse a ciertos horarios siendo para ciertas clases entonces, y él mentalmente digamos que está creciendo educativamente, creo. Let’s say 4K is like "Head Start" but it has times/schedule. Because let's say that 4K is more like the child learning to socialize. Not educational, academic. They taught him basic things like the alphabet and things like that, but it's different from how it is now [in kindergarten] that he does have a schedule where the first hour is reading, the second hour is math. So, for hours they have different classes then, well he already knows that he mentally has to adapt to certain schedules being for certain classes then, and to him mentally let's say that he is growing educationally, I think.
To Raquel, elementary 4K was structured more than Head Start in terms of schedules; however, 4K was not structured for academic learning. This was different from kindergarten which focused on academic learning with a set of schedules. Her child’s 4K experience was different from her expectation; earlier in the interview, she shared that she thought her child’s advanced academic readiness would be better served at school rather than at Head Start. Her expectation of academic focus in 4K was a result of her cultural background:

Entonces, si comparto la educación aquí con la que se da en mi país, creo que la de aquí está un poco retrasada. Porque digamos que los niños a los dos años ya entran al jardín. Y cuando ya están en 4K o lo que llaman aquí "kinder", un niño digamos que ya sabe el abecedario, colores -- una cantidad de cosas que aquí hasta ahora le están metiendo para que aprendan, o sea, es bien diferente.

So, if I compare the education [in the U.S.] with what is given in my country, I think that the one here is a little behind. Because let's say that children at two years old already enter kindergarten. And when they are already in 4K or what they call "kindergarten " here, a child, let's say, already knows the alphabet, colors -- several things that here until now are being put in for them to learn, that is very different.

Different education systems in her culture made her believe that 4K in the U.S. would have a more academic structure as well. However, the structure that she expected was not found in 4K but in kindergarten. This indicates that both Amber and Raquel preferred a structured 4K environment. However, their satisfaction with their 4K structure was different.

On the other hand, Grace, Elsa, and Nora hoped elementary 4K would provide a semi-structured environment when making their decisions. Their definitions of semi-structured environments varied. Grace — a Latinx mother whose income level was above the FPT — has a child who had stayed home before 4K. Grace believed that a semi-structured environment was the best place to support her child’s first group care experience. In her statement about a perfect 4K setting for her child, she described the semi-structured setting as a mediator that connected her home environment to the elementary structure:
I think what Harry really needed was to learn how to be with kids his age. The most important thing for me is that they start to like school. [...] Between having it be school but also having it be a little bit more homelike also, I think, so that it's an easier transition. Because when Harry was going from being at home. So, if it would have had to be immediate all structure, I think that would have been really challenging for him. So, I liked that the teachers had their home-type rugs, and they did a lot of things that you just kind of do at home more informal. And they built in structure as the year went on.

Her definition of a semi-structure included an educare (education and care) component. She expected elementary 4K to provide her child with an environment that combined both elementary- and home-like structures for her child’s better adjustment to elementary school. This preference for a semi-structure was also the reason that she chose a half-day 4K:

I know other families have a harder time with it. We liked that it was half-day, just for us personally. We really liked that. I think it would have been a pretty tough thing for Harry to jump into a full-day thing right away. [...] It was a really good, good bridge for him to now be in full-day kindergarten. I guess if they still offered half-day kindergarten, we would maybe even choose that [laughs]. But definitely, 4K really prepared him a lot for it.

Grace used the logic of “Not too little. Not too much. Just right” for her 4K decision. This meant that full-day was too structured for her child; half-day was just right for her child to get used to school before full-day kindergarten.

Similar but slightly different, Elsa and Nora preferred a semi-structure that has both free play and routine/curriculum. Elsa — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— has a child who attended a childcare center before 4K. She wanted her child to be prepared for kindergarten in a semi-structured, elementary 4K:

I think certainly having a teacher who is hired by the school district and certified to teach that age level is obviously ideal. I think there was a certain amount of routine and structure built into his day, but there was certainly lots of time for play and imagination, outside for recess, and inside was sort of some free time, which was really, really great for him.

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40 This was discussed in the section of “Parents’ decisions about whether they would enroll their children in 4K.”
Her choice of elementary 4K was deliberate: she believed that elementary 4K would provide both structured and unstructured learning under the guidance of certified district teachers. Even though all district 4K teachers had the same licenses to teach, she believed that elementary 4K teachers’ quality was guaranteed by the school district. Nora’s reasons for the 4K decision echoed Elsa’s.

Nora — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — explained why she chose elementary 4K over a childcare center that her child was using:

I thought it would be good for her to […] have a more curriculum-based direction instead of play. I mean, I still think that play is very important at that age, but some kind of structure, not that daycare isn’t structured. But, it’s less structured than the school environment.

After the 4K year, Nora was satisfied with the elementary 4K that provided both play-based (less structure) and curriculum (structure). When comparing Elsa and Nora’s story to Grace’s, their children’s previous childcare experiences led them to pursue different types of semi-structured environments in elementary 4K.

Together, regardless of race, these five mothers had preferences for either a structured or semi-structured learning environment. Their definitions of these criteria also varied. Yet, their preferences reflected their beliefs and values related to curriculum and instruction as well as their children’s previous childcare experiences. However, unlike mothers whose income levels were above the FPT (i.e., Elsa, Grace, and Nora), Amber and Raquel — FRL-eligible parents — had a strong preference for structured, academic learning.

2. Parents wanted to take advantage of the benefits of enrolling their children in 4K housed in their kindergarten schools.

Many elementary 4K parents believed that 4K housed in their children’s kindergarten schools would help their children to be familiar with physical school buildings, school
expectations, and people (e.g., peers and teachers). These parents felt that this would support their children’s smooth transition to kindergarten regardless of their race and class. Alice, Elsa, Nora, Adita, and Amber — mothers of their 4K children — explained how this played into their decisions.

Elsa — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — wanted her son to be in elementary 4K to develop his school readiness. Her decision about whether she would send her son to 4K\(^1\) was followed by where to send him for 4K. As a parent whose child had childcare experiences before 4K, she explained why it must have been elementary 4K: “We knew that there were several other 4K options. We could have investigated other partner providers through other daycares. But we felt like it was important to get him into the public school system.” This demonstrates that her family’s firm beliefs that elementary 4K would be better than childcare 4K made them not consider childcare 4K at all. Yet, one constraint existed: 4K was not provided at the elementary school nearby her place. She ended up sending her child to the second closest school which was less than optimal:

I think for us, being in a school as opposed to daycare was really ideal because I think it best prepared him for being in kindergarten in his actual school. I think we would have preferred for him to have been able to go to Lexus Elementary to be at the same school that he would then progress into, but it just wasn't an option for us. If I'm describing a perfect setting, that would be it. Because then he would have gone into kindergarten with some built-in friendships, knowing the building, and knowing some of the familiar faces. So, for him, I know he felt like he kind of had to keep restarting. And the first day of [kindergarten], anxiety was higher. Then maybe it would have been better to do 4K at Lexus. So, I think, ideally, it would be in the same school setting.

Her family was certain that they would like to send their son to elementary 4K even though there were community 4K options available. Specifically, they expected their son to get into a public school system, familiarize himself with a school environment, and establish friendships that

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\(^{1}\) I explained how Elsa made her decision about whether to send her son to 4K in the previous section, “Parents’ decisions about whether they would enroll their children in 4K.”
could be carried into kindergarten. However, the unavailability of 4K at their son’s kindergarten school made him attend a different elementary school, which then prevented him from achieving some of those goals. It made their son have an uneasy transition to kindergarten.

Adita, Amber, Nora, and Alice also wanted their children to move from their previous childcare setting to elementary school for 4K. However, unlike Elsa, they were successfully able to enroll their children in 4K at their children’s kindergarten schools. These parents’ reasons behind the same decision varied. For example, Nora —White mother whose income level was above the FPT— enrolled her daughter in 4K housed in kindergarten school to alleviate her daughter’s anxiety. After the kindergarten year, she explained how it benefited her daughter’s school experience:

A lot of her kids from 4K were in her same kindergarten class [...] or at least they had recess together prior. There were a lot of kids from our neighborhood that were in the same area, you know, baseball, any extracurricular activities. There were a lot of kids that she knew.

Familiarity with people that her daughter interacted with resulted from her attendance in elementary 4K in her neighborhood rather than staying in the childcare center for 4K.

Slightly different, Adita —a Black mother whose income level was above the FPT— wanted her daughter to familiarize herself with school rules and expectations by attending 4K at her kindergarten school: “I wanted her in the system, get to know the schools, the rules, and the routine, which is quite different from private preschools, so she’s enjoyed it.” As a result, Adita’s daughter had a smooth transition to kindergarten:

Adita: [When she transitioned to kindergarten,] she was pretty confident; just walked right in, felt right at home, and just started doing what she needed to do. It may have taken her a little longer to adjust to an intense schedule, but she was confident about her surroundings, where she was, and the people that she was with. It wasn't a total panic.
Interviewer: Why do you think she felt comfortable?
Adita: I don’t know. She was there. If I see you next time, I'll be comfortable around you because I've seen you before, but if you show up only once I'll be like "who is this
person," you know? I think the familiarity with the environment and the routine sort of helped her. "Oh, I've been to this place before. I've done this before. I can do this."

Familiarity with her school environment and people was the additional biggest benefit of attending elementary 4K for her daughter.

Amber — an FRL-eligible Black mother — echoed this benefit but added one more benefit of it for her son’s language learning when transitioning to kindergarten:

As far as his experience I feel like it helped him for kindergarten, specifically since he went to 4K in the same place where he goes to kindergarten, which is why I liked that option rather than having him do 4K at the daycare center where he was because they offered 4K, but I felt like it'd be nice to get him to go into the school, his sister was already there because she goes to school there. [...] He felt comfortable already at the school, so I think it helped him transition. Specifically, because he's in the DLI program and I think that's a lot for a five-year-old to learn to do things in English and Spanish at the same time, but he didn't have that extra worry of a new building and new environment so that part was already kind of worked out. So, I feel like it helped him with that, too.

Attending elementary 4K helped her son to have an additional year to get used to the school building. This gave him familiarity with the school, which then helped him to focus mainly on language learning in the DLI kindergarten rather than dispersing his attention to manage multiple things simultaneously. Another parent, Alice — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — added the additional benefit of attending 4K at the DLI school:

I think [4K] prepared her really well. It created some independence. I mean she was teary the first day we dropped her off at 4K, but she got used to that and got used to being with her friends and working social and academic. I think in her mind preparing for the first day of kindergarten she understood what it would feel like to arrive at school and follow her teacher's instructions and find her seat, and none of that was scary, which I think was really helpful.

Attending 4K at the kindergarten school helped her daughter to learn school expectations in advance and be an independent learner in the DLI program where it could have been strange and new. This was the reason that Alice considered enrolling her daughter in 4K at the same elementary school building “as a good segue into her [daughter’s] experience in [the DLI
program].” Based on what Adita, Amber, Nora, and Alice shared, the familiarity and continuity they valued manifested in different ways depending on their contexts.

These five parents chose elementary 4K for a reason regardless of their race and class. They all believed that a school environment would provide their children with continuity and familiarity. This was then believed to be a good stepping stone to smoothly transition into kindergarten. For this reason, they moved their children from their previous childcare settings to elementary schools for 4K. However, the constraint in 4K availability at their children’s kindergarten schools prevented them from fully achieving their goals.

3. **Parents aimed for their children’s attendance in bilingual 4K and DLI programs in kindergarten when making their 4K decisions.**

Many parents enrolled their children in elementary 4K because of a Spanish bilingual program and/or a DLI program at kindergarten. Grace, Tammy, Elsa, and Alice’s stories demonstrated how their race and language differently influenced their views on Spanish language learning and further affected their 4K decisions.

Grace is a Latinx mother whose income level was above the FPT and who has two Spanish bilingual children; her youngest child was the 4K child during the 2016-17 school year. In the survey, she explained why she chose elementary 4K and subsequently kindergarten at the same school: “We chose Gilbert Elementary because we speak Spanish at home. Our boys both went to Spanish-only-4K and then to DLI for kindergarten.” Due to her family’s home language (Spanish), two of their children have been raised as bilingual and attended 100% Spanish-only-4K in the district. In the interview, she explained things that she had to keep in mind as she made her decision:

*We knew we wanted it to be at a school. I know a lot of the daycares do 4K. And we definitely would not have made that decision maybe just because we don’t have as much*
experience with childcare. But I guess we knew we wanted it to be at a school, the Spanish. We really wanted Henry to go to the same school that Olson went to. Yeah, that was a big deal.

Grace and her husband considered multiple factors for their decision: their 4K son’s bilingual needs and his sibling’s attendance at the same school. As a result, enrolling their 4K son in a Spanish bilingual program at their older child’s elementary school was the perfect plan for Grace’s family. However, Grace and her husband were not happy about the proportion of Spanish instruction in older grades beyond 4K despite the valuable opportunity to strengthen their child’s home language at school. Since her family wanted their child to practice Spanish from 4K, kindergarten, to 1st and 2nd grades, the proportion of Spanish instruction mattered to them:

**Interviewer:** What did [the DLI] look like?

**Grace:** That’s maybe the one thing that we’re not very happy with. So, Olson, our older son, 4K was 100%, and then kindergarten was 90% Spanish/10% English. Our first grade was 80% Spanish/20% English. He’s in second grade now. It’s 70% Spanish/ 20% English. [...] I guess the district is having a hard time recruiting enough Spanish-speaking children and Spanish-speaking teachers. So, now DLI [for the younger son] is 50/50 in kindergarten and up. So, I think that Olson’s literacy in Spanish and his comfort in Spanish - He can talk about academic things in Spanish that Henry, I don’t think, got as much of this year because it’s 50/50 now. The one thing though is that Olson in second grade doesn’t know short vowels in English. Henry learned short vowels in English. So, it’s just a completely different curriculum. [...] As a family, we would really love Henry to have that same connection to Spanish that Olson did in school that definitely helps foster that. [...] The teacher said that they’re actually reducing. So, this year they had three DLI kindergartens. They’re reducing it to two next year because they’re having such a hard time getting Spanish-speaking families to enroll. [...] Henry had such a nice group in 4K, all native Spanish speakers but they weren’t together. The teacher said it’s because they had so few Spanish speakers, they had to parse them out. Because there were so many native English speakers enrolled, and so they needed native Spanish speakers in each class to make it work. That did affect it. The times that I went to the classroom, there was a lot more English than there was with Olson. I feel like Olson has friends that he will only speak in Spanish and friends that he speaks both. And Henry has a couple of friends whom he speaks in Spanish but it’s mostly English.

From what she shared, there were multiple issues found: the proportion of Spanish instruction after the 4K year, its influences on her child’s home language learning, and issues in the
operation of Spanish bilingual programs in the district. For parents like Grace who wanted their child to continue strengthening their home language at school, less proportion of Spanish instruction and Spanish-speaking students could be discouraging. According to how she described the operation of Spanish immersion programs, the recruitment of more native Spanish speakers or fewer English speakers was the key for the district to provide the continuity of language learning experiences for bilingual children from 4K to older grades.

On the other hand, non-Spanish speaking parents’ preferences for their children’s foreign language acquisition made them actively seek those opportunities ahead of time, influencing their 4K decisions. Tammy, Elsa, and Alice — non-Spanish-speaking mothers — shared their 4K decision-making processes. Tammy — an FRL-eligible Black mother — enrolled her child in a particular elementary 4K because she envisioned that her child would attend a DLI program at the same school in the following year. When making her decision, she was almost certain that her child would have a positive experience at her child’s elementary 4K due to her older child’s positive experience both in 4K and the DLI program: “I knew that one. I wanted my daughter [(4K child)] to follow in the same footsteps that my son followed in because he’s in a dual emergent program. And his experience at LaGrange and 4K was really wonderful, and I think the program really did prepare him.” Her older child’s positive experience informed her decision. Then, her values related to second language acquisition did too. When asked why she chose a particular elementary school that provided the DLI program in kindergarten, she explained how language could be a cultural asset to live in this modern world:

Because Spanish is the most spoken language in the world. Right? And I definitely feel like — I mean, I took French for seven years and I should have taken Spanish. I want my kid to be multilingual. I don't believe that anyone should just know one language. The world is complex. It's changing. It's not just one thing. English is not the dominant language, even though it is the business language. But I don't believe that it's going to
always be that way.

Her 4K decision was related to how she viewed multilingualism in this globalized society. It was multilingualism that would move her child’s competency to the next level.

Parents’ preferences for second language acquisition were also found in other White mothers’ decision-making stories; these parents’ income levels were above the FPT. Alice explained why her values related to language learning influenced her choice of her current school district and elementary school:

[Albertson elementary school] was a good segue into her experience in Cervantes Escuela. [...] I mean the dual-language opportunity that’s what’s going to keep us here in Madison. We had talked about moving back to North Carolina, but it’s too spectacular of an opportunity to walk away from. I really think it’s the reason we will continue to live here.

To Alice, language learning opportunities in the district were perceived as a uniquely beneficial opportunity for her daughter to be successful in the future. She explained how language learning would prepare her daughter: “It opens up your mind culturally, but it’s also an incredible asset moving forward with college and employment. I think more and more people will be bilingual.”

As far as the views on language learning, Elsa, who also wanted her child to learn Spanish as a second language, elaborated on what the DLI meant to her child linguistically and culturally:

Spanish is becoming such a dominant language in this country and all over the world that we felt like it would prepare them well career-wise in getting into school. Just giving them options for whatever they might want to do, whether they want to live abroad or study abroad, just to have that skill set we felt like would be really important. [...] We thought that that would prepare them really well, and we also just feel like it would kind of broaden their mindset and their perspective on the world. I mean, we’re like a pretty typical middle-class, white family, but we want these kids to know that that’s not the experience of everybody. We knew that they would be in a classroom that had 50% native Spanish speakers and 50% native English speakers. So, there’s that built-in diversity of experience that we thought would be really beneficial for them.

Alice valued 50/50 DLI kindergarten because of the opportunity for language acquisition and “built-in diversity of experiences” which she thought were not easy to have as “a pretty typical
middle-class, White family.” She had enough reason to pursue 4K within the DLI kindergarten school. However, she hit a roadblock with 4K supply issues; 4K was not provided at her child’s kindergarten school where a DLI program was offered. As a result, her child had to attend 4K at a different school and then moved to the school that she originally aimed at.

To put it all together, because bilingual and DLI programs were provided only in elementary schools, parents who considered their children’s language needs chose a particular elementary school that had language programs. The analysis showed that their 4K decisions depended on their race and language needs. Also, second-language acquisition was valued mostly by families whose income levels were above the FPT; except for Tammy, other non-Spanish-speaking parents, who made 4K decisions due to their values related to second language acquisition, were more likely to have income levels that were above the FPT.

Tammy, Grace, Alice, and Elsa’s stories told us that parents made 4K decisions with different values: language as a beneficial future asset and language as a heritage. From their stories, bilingual children’s parents wanted more Spanish learning opportunities with more Spanish-speaking students to strengthen their home language. However, it became difficult when many English-speaking parents also wanted Spanish learning opportunities for their children for future assets. This issue will be revisited in the discussion section in Part III along with the purpose of the DLI program.

In addition, unlike Tammy, Elsa, Alice, and Grace who all aimed for their children’s Spanish learning, the group of parents that I have not included in this section were families who speak Nepali and Hmong. Because there were no Asian bilingual language programs in the district except for one Hmong bilingual program in kindergarten, Jamala’s child had to

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42 Jamala’s decision-making story was introduced in the section, “Parents’ decisions about whether they would enroll their children in 4K.”
practice English at 4K with the support of teachers or speech therapists rather than strengthening their home language (Nepali) through bilingual programs at school. Even for Hmong parents, their children did not have a chance to strengthen their home language in 4K because Hmong bilingual 4K programs were not provided in the district. As a result, for these parents speaking Nepali and Hmong, their children’s language needs did not affect their decisions about where to send their children. Instead, their decisions were related to whether to send their children. Instead, their decisions were related to whether to send their children for 4K.

4. Parents of children with special needs prioritized their children’s needs and the availability of special education services.

For parents of children with special needs, their decisions about where to send their children to 4K depended on the availability of special education services, which was their top priority. I will explain how the availability of special education services influenced parents’ housing search, their trajectory of the use of special education services from 3K to 4K, and ultimately their 4K decision-making processes.

I found that parents looked for school districts where they provided special education services even during their housing searches. Adita — a Black mother whose income level was above the FPT — shared how her 4K decision was carefully curated even before moving to her neighborhood:

**Adita:** We wanted to be in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) because as you can see, I’m Black, my husband is White, and our kids are biracial. I interviewed a lot of different schools, just to get a sense of what was going on in the schools, and what services they offer the children. Madison had both diversity of color, ethnicity, and diversity of programs in general. So, I thought my kids would have a better, more enriched experience going to Madison schools.

**Interviewer:** What did you find about the program?

**Adita:** Well, my oldest daughter [(4K child)] needed special education services, and Madison was literally the only school district that offered them for 4 days out of 5 and

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43 Mei is a Hmong mother who will be introduced in the following section, “Parents of children with special needs prioritized their children’s needs and the availability of special education services.”. Her child has both limited English proficiency and special needs.
could get Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy, and that was important to me, but I did check with several other school districts before we bought the house, but then found out Madison is where we wanted to be because of their services and the diversity and so we bought this house based on that.

Adita’s statement allowed us to learn that the MMSD provided comparatively accommodating services for children with special needs. She also explained the complexity of her decision-making in that her decision to move to her neighborhood was related to both her child’s race and special needs. MMSD was a better choice for her daughter because it had both diversity and special education services available. This tells us that parents of color whose children had special needs had to consider multiple factors that would allow their children to best thrive. Adita’s decision also tells us how parents’ 4K decisions could be made a long time before the 4K year with their clear goals that would work for their families.

In addition, during their children’s 3K year, many parents (e.g., Adita, Mei, and Nora) started to use special education services in the public school system mostly due to their availability. This then led them to maintain continuity of using the services at the public school during the 4K year. Adita shared how she enrolled her daughter in 3K at a public school: “Because she’s a special needs child. She needed those and the school districts are providing them for free. You gotta take advantage of that even though we still paid for private therapists.” However, her child’s 3K site was not her choice: “We didn’t really pick. The Madison schools tell you what programs have it.” This happened to Mei’s child as well. Mei — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT— shared that her son was assigned to his 3K as soon as he got evaluated by the district: “By the time the school evaluated him, he was too old to do the in-home program. So, they put him in [3K] right away.” Also, another parent, Nora — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— had a similar experience; the district told her which school her daughter should attend for speech services during the 3K year:
I realized she wasn’t talking. [...] A speech pathologist observed her at daycare and in the classroom [...] came to our house and did more of a one-on-one kind of interaction. Then they recommended this phonology school [at Mills Elementary school], which was great.

For Adita, Mei, and Nora, entering the elementary school system was not entirely their choice but the district’s choice upon the diagnostic evaluation of their children. Their children all started attending elementary schools due to their necessity and 3K availability for special education.

Their initial access to 3K led the parents to gain information about 4K without an effort. The information was *given* to them because they were already in the system; this influenced their 4K decisions. Adita supported this: “Because we were already in the system. 4K wasn’t really like, ‘Oh, I heard about 4K. Let’s go check it out!’ We already had the information. We knew that she was going to go into the program because of the services.” Like Adita, Mei also knew the quality of special education services from her child’s 3K experience, leading her to stay in the public school system. Likewise, Nora has also been informed about 4K enrollment while her child was attending a half-day, phonology school and wrap-around care during a 3K year:

From phonology school, we were already associated with speech pathologists in the district. I think that we had more readily available information than maybe other first-time 4K parents. In combination with daycare, center it was all over it, like, “Hey, 4K enrollment is now.”

Nora later shared that she had to call the district to get information about special education services in 3K. However, she did not need to for 4K because 4K information was readily available once her child was in the system.

Together with their 3K experiences and 4K information they gathered, parents considered their priority in their children’s special needs to decide *where* to send their children for 4K. For example, Nora decided to keep her daughter in the same phonology elementary school which
operated half-day only for three days while enrolling her in a different elementary school for 4K (her child’s kindergarten school) and a childcare center for wrap-around care:

**Nora:** So, the speech was only three days a week. [...] Then 4K is [...] four-half-days. [...] **Interviewer:** Because she went to Mills three days a week [for speech] and [a different school for 4K for four days a week], how did you manage the morning time? **Nora:** That she wasn’t? She would go to daycare. So, daycare was very involved in transportation.

Although her child had to go to three different locations during the 4K year, this was the way for Nora to “prioritize what’s the most important thing for [her child],” according to Nora. Like Nora, Adita also prioritized her child’s needs and decided to use the services at an elementary school for the continuation of high-quality special education services that her child had been receiving since 3K:

The reason we went for the 4K program for the Madison schools is that our oldest [(4K child)] actually started in the 3K program, this is the pre-program because she needed the extra services. When she graduated from birth to three, they put her there. So, she's been under assistance because of speech and all the good services that they get through the schools. That was a very good experience. The special education teachers that worked with her were so great and it was such a better experience really in the sense that these were professionals who were trained to do what they're supposed to do as opposed to a regular daycare setting where you get what you get.

Adita’s testimony indicated that she felt that the quality of special education services was better than the one at childcare centers. For this reason, continuing to use an elementary school for 4K was her decision.

Mei’s child also had a 3K experience at a public school; however, Mei’s child moved to a different school for 4K because her family moved to a new neighborhood but was still able to work with the group of therapists at a new school. She recalled what she prioritized for her 4K decision: “It was mostly about us advocating for him. That was one of the biggest factors in us choosing the school we went to. We advocated for him. That’s why he got the options he did.”
This indicates that she put her son’s needs above anything else. She elaborated more on her decision-making process which started at the end of 3K year:

He had a group of therapists that worked with him [in 3K]. So, he went there for a year, and we noticed a significant improvement in his speech. But his behavior was still an issue because he was young and still learning how to cope with his feelings. So, when he was finished with that, we were kind of struggling to figure out, “Okay, what school is the best place for you?” Because that was the year we were transitioning to our new house. So, it would be really hard for him to move to this side of town. So, we decided that since we had a good relationship with [...] Fiona Elementary School, which our two oldest ones went to. So, when we talked to the school district, they allowed us to do an internal transfer. [...] And he also had a regular teacher and a group of therapists that worked with him every single day. And that's why we went to Fiona on that side of town. And it was a good thing we did, too, because they were phenomenal.

Mei had to consider which school would be the best for her child’s needs and then her family’s needs. She was satisfied with the availability of quality services during 4K at her child’s new school. Her satisfaction was also found when she described the quality of the district’s special education services:

The school district's been pretty good about IEPs. [My child] doesn't have a very high-end physical need, so we haven't had the choice of ever asking for anything above and beyond what he currently has. So, in terms of that, I think what they're doing right now meets the need. He's learning a lot and they're being very receptive and flexible with working with us to meet his IEP needs.

Mei appreciated the quality of service and progress that her child made through the services.

Slightly different from the experiences of Adita, Mei, and Nora, Raquel’s child received speech therapy services at Head Start during the 3K year and continued the services after moving to an elementary school for 4K. Raquel — an FRL-eligible, Latinx mother — described the provision of speech services at elementary 4K as a default because it was given at a site:

Cuando entró en "Head Start", me recomendaron ver a un terapeuta. Y luego comencé a hablar con una terapeuta llamada Tara. Y ella vino aquí a la casa para darle terapia. Y cuando entró a la escuela, bueno, fue directamente con la escuela, la terapia. Pero creo que la diferencia es que alguien que está contigo personalmente en la escuela es totalmente diferente. Porque Daniel va a terapia con otros compañeros, entonces creo que es más complicado de esa manera.
When he entered "Head Start," they recommended me to see a therapist. I then started talking to a therapist named Tara. And she came here to the house to give him therapy. And when he entered school, well, he went directly to the school, the therapy. But I think the difference is that someone who is with you personally at school is totally different. Because Daniel goes to therapy with other classmates, so I think it's more complicated that way.

Because her child had been using the services before the 4K year, Raquel was able to figure out whether her child continued receiving similar quality services during 4K.

To summarize, almost all parents of children with special needs prioritized their children’s special needs for their 4K decisions in every way across their race and class. Their 4K decisions were also influenced by their children’s use of services in 3K in the public school system or Early Head Start. Parents’ race could also add another layer to their children’s 4K decisions, which narrowed their options.

5. **Parents considered the benefits of public education.**

Parents took advantage of the benefits of public education when making their decisions. The benefits they thought about included fulfilling their duties as sound citizens, having diversity at school, and being free of cost. To explain in detail, parents considered the choice of public school as their moral obligation so they could have a sense of belonging to their communities and society; they also valued a diverse population and critical approaches to diversity in public schools as well as free education.

Alice and Tammy showed the epitome of 4K decisions related to their pro-public views and value of diversity. Alice — a White, stay-home mother whose income level was above the FPT— decided to send her child to elementary 4K due to her family’s pro-public-school beliefs. She explained why it led her to choose elementary school over childcare 4K:

**Alice:** I did a lot of online research in terms of what sites are available because I knew Francesca Elementary had a site, but like Molly Nursery there are other private locations. But Chris and I are really pro-public schools, and I know the whole 4K program is public,
but we like the idea of being in one of Madison's own buildings as opposed to some of
the private sites. [...] I toured Molly Nursery, I toured Francesca, and we went with our
gut because a lot of the verbal advice we got from other families who had gone through
4K in the area was actually anti-Francesca. Francesca has I think a historically low
reputation, which may have been true in the past but I don't think it has been true for the
last five years, and it's just all of these families aren't learning about any changes that
have occurred, they just have in their head what the school's reputation used to be. So, we
had to go tour it ourselves and make our own, formulate our own opinion about it. But I
got a tour of the entire school and there were no kids in the hallway, everybody was
learning, and they had their curriculum. I didn't have any criticism at all.

Interviewer: How many schools did you visit?
Alice: I toured just those two. I spoke to Loyola, which has a 4K program also, and I
spoke to someone there on the phone. But after touring Francesca we were pretty sure
that we wanted to go there. And I think I called the district to get the odds, but they said
most people who requested Francesca as their first choice would get in. So, we did.

Her family’s strong belief in public schools was their biggest decision-making factor. To decide
which 4K site they would like to choose among three options, they consulted with other families
whose children attended schools in their neighborhood area, had a tour of the schools, and spoke
to district staff. Disregarding the school’s low reputation, Alice used her observations instead to
decide. This was her way of advocating for a neighborhood public school and showing that her
family was differentiated from other families. When asked if she would make the same decision,
she expressed how important it would be to her family to choose elementary 4K: “I would. Yes,
[... Because] it’s our neighborhood school, we want to support our neighborhood school.” Like
Alice, other interviewed parents, who were not included in this subgroup analysis but had pro-
public beliefs, were also White parents whose income levels were above the FPT.

In addition, diversity was the prominent component that parents considered for choosing
their elementary 4K. Along with the pro-public beliefs, Alice pointed out that diversity was an
additional important factor for her family to choose elementary over childcare 4K:

I toured it, but there was a lot more diversity at Francesca Elementary school, which was
important to us. [...] I’m really happy she met as many different kids from different parts
of the city as she did. I think 4K at Molly Nursery, I’m sure they’re really good, but it’s
all more affluent families, affluent white families mostly.

Overall, her pro-public views constantly appeared when she contrasted the elementary 4K to childcare 4K. Through the tour, she made sure that the elementary 4K had diversity which meant having not all affluent White families like childcare 4K.

However, unlike Alice, Tammy — an FRL-eligible, Black mother — chose her child’s elementary school for 4K because the school’s approach towards diversity was aligned with her perspective:

Part of why I chose the 4K because she could have gone anywhere, is because, with my experiences with the school, I know that the principal has put into her school being culturally competent, having a huge emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and what that means. Recognizing that students in the school district are the majority of kids of color. That’s important for me. […] I want them to feel that education is valued. I want them to have teachers who promote that with them and value them as individuals with their own perspective identities. […] I definitely make decisions based on where I feel my children are going to have the best opportunity to learn with people who are going to treat them fairly.

Tammy’s reasons for her 4K decision indicated her critical views on diversity, which was to advocate for her child’s sound learning and identity development in the classroom as a child of color. According to Tammy, diversity was not simply the number of children of color or the composition of the school population. Instead, it was deeply embedded within teachers’ pedagogies and the inclusive school culture, which was a hidden curriculum that might not be easily seen.

Furthermore, as one of the benefits of public-school attendance, some parents took advantage of free education. Especially for parents who stayed home or worked part-time or nightshifts, elementary 4K was perceived as their free childcare. Jamala is a Nepalese mother who stayed home and whose income level was above the FPT. She viewed 4K as free childcare for a parent herself and an educational opportunity for her child:
I'm glad that Madison offers a 4K program for kids which is good for us too. We get free time. It's free time for us. And they go outside and get the experience of playing with kids. And, for me, when he's at home, I have to be at home all the time, but at least I get some time to go out, and my daughter also gets some time to go out because we have to pick him up or drop him off.

There was no economic burden on parents like Jamala if education in 4K were provided for free and parents did not have to worry about wrap-around care after the half-day 4K. This indicated that elementary 4K meant free childcare to some parents like Jamala; educational opportunities provided in 4K were a plus for their children.

However, Amber and Glennis Jordan, who are both employed FRL-eligible Black parents, valued free education for a different reason. They thought that elementary 4K was not only free but also academic-oriented. In other words, it was cost-effective. Amber explained why elementary 4K was a lot more bang for their buck than childcare 4K:

We really wanted [elementary 4K], because even though the centers would say, “Hey, we can do the same thing.” We were like, “No. That's in the same setting as the preschool.” So, we didn't feel like it would be beneficial. Also, we would be paying $200 and something a week for them to do and play, where he could go to an actual school, it was free, and he could actually be in that setting where he was going to be next year and start to get a feel for the building and the teachers and that sort of thing.

After the cost-benefit analysis, Amber and her husband chose elementary 4K housed in their child’s kindergarten school due to cost-effectiveness and their child’s school readiness. Based on what she shared later in the interview, this made them be willing to hire a nanny to cover their wrap-around care after the half-day 4K rather than paying a huge amount of money to the childcare center for play-based learning.

In summary, parents’ views on the benefits of public schools played a partial role in their decision-making. For some, choosing public schools was something that made them proud as responsible citizens of their society and community. For others, choosing elementary schools mattered due to their values related to diversity as well as a free educational opportunity.
Considering parents who were not included in this subgroup analysis, I found that pro-public-school views were held by White parents whose income levels were above the FPT like Alice. Also, parents’ views on diversity often differed by race (i.e., Alice and Tammy) while their views on free education were related to gender and class (i.e., Jamala and Amber and Glennis Jordan).

Table E16 summarizes parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K by multiple benefits of public education. This indicates parents’ decision-making was multilayered.

[Insert Table E16]

Parents’ resource allocation for their 4K decisions and 4K access

Even though parents had ideas about whether and where their children would attend 4K, what made them finalize their decision was mostly an amalgamation of their different types of resources such as information sources, time, and financial resources. These resources allowed them to access 4K that they perceived as high-quality and available. However, depending on how many resources they had, their accessibility varied. I will explain how parents accommodated their resources, quality that includes their educational beliefs/values, and 4K supply and why they needed to compromise on what they wanted during their decision-making processes.

1. Parents’ information influenced their decisions about where to send their children for 4K.

Parents used location and social resources when making their 4K decisions; each parent used more than one resource. I will first introduce how parents gained the school/district-related information through their residence in their neighborhoods or even their housing search processes. This type of information then made parents automatically eliminate other 4K options.
1) Location resources

Mei, Alice, Jamala, Adita, and Nora gained information about their district and elementary school even before moving to their neighborhood. Mei — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FTP — studied elementary schools in her new neighborhood during her housing search. When asked about the reasons for choosing her current neighborhood, she shared that her family looked for a neighborhood that was safe and provided firm infrastructure that would satisfy their educare (education and care) needs:

A lot of it was around the logistics of how we can make things work for the kids because it wasn't about us. [...] We decided that school-wise for the children, it was the best option for them. We would've loved living on the west side. That would've been our preference. But in this area after all of our research into the bus system, the schools, the academic programs that are available after school programs, the childcare programs that they have available, and the distance that our kids would have to walk if they were appropriate. So, we found that the area where we live currently was the best option. [...] So we bought a house in this area. So, lots of research through the Internet with our realtor, a lot of it was us doing it ourselves. So, like I told my husband, it's not the best and the most beautiful house. It's not a dream house, but it's the best for the situation until our kids are older.

Mei’s family did thorough research on the bus system, schools, and after-school programs that were attached to its neighborhood before buying their current house. This then allowed them to send their older children to one of their neighborhood schools, followed by transferring their 4K child with special needs to the same elementary school for 4K as soon as he finished the 3K year at a different school in their previous neighborhood. Tracing back to their housing search, Mei already thought ahead about the school, after-school, and wrap-around care options for her 4K child. In addition, like Mei, Adita — a Black mother whose income level was above the FTP— also studied her neighborhood and its school district during her housing search as I explained earlier. She chose her neighborhood after interviewing a lot of different schools to learn about special education services and the diversity of the district. Choosing the right neighborhood was
her way of accommodating her biracial child with special needs, which then influenced her decision of choosing the neighborhood school for her 4K child.

If Mei and Adita gained information about the district or neighborhood infrastructure in a broader sense, Alice, Jamala, and Nora specifically looked at what schools their children would attend during their housing search. Alice — a White mother whose income level was above the FP — gathered information about her child’s school for the 4K and kindergarten years: “One of the reasons we bought a house in this neighborhood is it’s connected to Francesca [(4K school)], which gave us preference into Cervantes Escuela and to the DLI [(kindergarten school)].” This indicates that she already knew that her child’s 4K school did not provide the DLI and that her child had to attend different schools for 4K and kindergarten to attend the DLI program. Moreover, like Alice, Jamala — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — gained information about which school was good from people when looking for her house: “When we were looking for the house, we looked at the school area and everything. Charles Elementary school was the best, so we decided to move to our neighborhood because of that. We all knew that Charles was a good school for elementary school.” Jamala was confident that Charles Elementary school would be the best option for her child, influencing her housing search and 4K decision. Then, Nora — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — also considered the proximity of the home school as one of the reasons for choosing her current neighborhood: “This apartment is close to the school, close to daycare, and close to their father’s house.” Altogether, these parents researched schools that their children would attend even before moving to their neighborhoods. This indicates that a 4K search was already done before the family’s moving; this made them not consider many 4K locations (i.e., one to two locations) at the time of 4K enrollment.
As opposed to these parents whose income levels were above the FPT and who studied the district and schools before moving, most FRL-eligible parents were more likely to simply choose schools that happened to be in their neighborhoods regardless of their race and gender. Amber — an FRL-eligible, Black mother — perceived that only one neighborhood school was available to her when making her decision:

This was the school [my child] would go to kindergarten. That’s why it was the only option to pick this school because otherwise, we’d be out of the district, and it was like what’s the point in driving to another school if he’s going to go here and his sister goes here? So, it was really the only one that made sense in that.

This demonstrates that parents’ consideration of neighborhood schools could unquestionably eliminate other 4K options. Elsa — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— also echoed this: “He went to Pleasant Hill Elementary school. That was the school that we fed naturally through the public school system.” Similar reasons were also found in Bentlee’s (an FRL-eligible, Asian father) and Raquel’s (an FRL-eligible, Latinx mother) decision-making stories. Raquel, for example, considered only neighborhood schools: “Busqué todos los que están por aquí porque hay como tres escuelas. I looked for all the ones around here because there are about three schools.” To sum up the FRL-eligible parents’ decision-making processes, 4K options were already narrowed down based on their neighborhood areas; the number of programs they considered ranged from one to three.

2) Social resources

In addition to parents’ location resources, they also used social resources such as their social circles, their older children’s previous experiences at the same elementary school, and school districts. I will first describe parents’ resources from social circles. Three mothers whose income levels were above the FPT— Alice, Jamala, and Elsa — explained how their neighbors, friends, and family members influenced their 4K decision-making:
A lot of people in the neighborhood recommend we go there. – Alice (White mother)

We heard about the 4K program from our friends. – Jamala (Asian mother)

We just sort of got the information from the school district. My sister is a teacher in the Madison School District. So, she’s always a really useful resource for us. She always knows what’s going on. – Elsa (White mother)

These parents considered the information gained from people in their social circles trustworthy and reliable. This made them feel no need to explore other options with confidence.

Furthermore, parents’ work experiences informed their decisions. Two FRL-eligible Black mothers — Amber and Tammy — shared how their insiders’ perspectives circulating at their workplaces informed them about the value of 4K, the quality components, and a particular school’s culture. Amber, for example, learned about the quality factors to consider for 4K enrollment and the benefit of 4K while working at the parent support office:

I worked in the parent support office. [...] When I was pregnant, even when he was an infant, just working in that environment with the childcare directors, doing the four-star rating program, I knew what to look for in centers. Also, there was a lot of research that had come out at that time about the benefits of 4K and how it impacts high school graduation, reading levels, and college readiness. So 4K wasn't an option, I guess. Our kids were going to go into 4K because of that.

For Amber, 4K was not optional because she learned about how it would influence children’s learning from 4K to college. Plus, she gained knowledge about what to look for in an early childhood program from her workplace, which influenced her decision as well.

Slightly differently, another FRL-eligible Black mother, Tammy, learned about her child’s 4K school’s culture and had opportunities to interact with other African American parents at work:

Actively already being on the Madison School District Parent Advisory Board. I sit on the Superintendent's Advisory Board with Dr. Kelsey and then with the African American Parents Group. [...] I know that with my experiences with LaGrange Elementary school, the work that the principal has put into her school being culturally
competent and having a huge emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

Tammy’s description of whom she interacted with and what information she gained tell us that she was able to understand what could not have been seen as an outsider. This led her to choose her child’s school that aligned with her values of a culturally competent pedagogy and diversity.

Moreover, parents’ older children’s previous school experiences allowed them to learn about the 4K program and its enrollment procedure ahead of time across race and class. As I explained earlier in the section on parents’ beliefs/values related to language acquisition, Tammy—an FRL-eligible Black mother—sent her 4K child to LaGrange Elementary school partially because of her older child’s positive experience in 4K and the DLI kindergarten before. Tammy’s older child’s previous experience with 4K and the DLI program informed her how great the program would be for her 4K child as well. Also, Grace—a Latinx mother whose income level was above the FPT—already knew where to send her 4K child due to her older child’s previous bilingual 4K attendance. For this reason, she already knew the benefits of enrolling siblings in the same bilingual 4K program, which influenced her 4K decision:

**Interviewer:** Oliver went to 4K in the Spanish immersion program.
**Grace:** Yup, yup.
**Interviewer:** And then Harry also went there.
**Grace:** Yup. So, what [the district] told us was once your first child gets in, your second child will get in. It was more of a process for us to get Oliver in, and then, once Oliver was in, Harry was automatically.

After her first child attended the bilingual 4K program, she was able to gain the information that her younger child (4K child) could also get into the bilingual 4K program automatically due to the sibling enrollment policy in the district. This type of information was given to her due to her older child’s experience. However, it was different when she initially enrolled her older child in the bilingual 4K program before; her husband had to seek out information about the program through phone calls:
We'd heard about other English-speaking families that went to 4K in English and then went to the DLI program, which wasn't something that we wanted to do. So, we called the district, and there were a couple of women in the district. They're Latina, maybe Outreach workers? They are fantastic. They were so helpful. I mean, so helpful. They really talked about the option for native Spanish speakers. They helped him kind of fill out the forms that we needed to do to have our kids be native Spanish speakers. Once they're listed as native Spanish speakers in the district, then they're eligible for the Spanish 4K.

Grace’s description demonstrates that getting her first child into the system made her next child’s 4K enrollment easier. Otherwise, her family would have had to learn about Spanish bilingual 4K options from scratch and go through the procedure to list her 4K child as native Spanish speakers in the district. As shown in Grace and Tammy’s stories, they both used their older children’s positive experiences in 4K and kindergarten at their chosen schools for their 4K decisions; their 4K children were both beneficiaries of the sibling policy in the district language programs.

However, Mei — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT— used her older children’s school experiences differently. She transferred her 4K child with special needs to her older children’s school which she had a good relationship with: “We had a good relationship with Fiona Elementary school, which our two oldest ones went to. So, when we talked to the school district, they allowed us to do an internal transfer [for our 4K child].” Her relationship with the older children’s school and the school’s accommodation informed her 4K decision.

In addition, parents gained 4K information from the district (e.g., information sheets, school tours, phone calls, and school websites) across their race and class. For example, Elsa —a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— “got information coming home from the school district.” Then, Alice —a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — had a school tour to learn about the 4K school’s curriculum, instruction, and environment before 4K enrollment:
The principal of the building gave me the tour herself, gave me a tour of the whole building, and talked to me about its history. We popped our heads into all three of the 4K classrooms. We didn't interrupt, but I got to talk to a couple of the teachers. She talked to me about how they were aligning curriculum, how they all did carpet time, and how they all read the same story and worked on the same academics. It was really good. I was impressed she gave me that much of her time honestly because it was all said and done. It was probably a 30-minute tour in the middle of a school day.

Since Alice was a stay-home mom, she was able to attend the tour in the middle of the school day. From her observations and conversations with the teachers and principal, she gained useful information about the school for her 4K decision.

Then, Raquel — an FRL-eligible, Latinx mother — searched for information about the 4K program through the district school website. She was the only one who looked up academic profiles of schools on the website among the interview participants:

Raquel: Tenía metas académicas para Daniel en el programa de 4 años, quiero saber si el programa de 4 años cumplió con esas metas que tenías para Daniel. [...] De hecho, antes de poner a Daniel en la escuela, busqué las mejores escuelas en línea. La escuela con mejor expediente académico para niños de primaria fue Laredo. Siempre he sido muy dedicada a la escuela de mis hijos, buscando lo mejor para ellos.

Interviewer: Está bien. ¿Qué quiso decir con "grabar"?

Raquel: Bueno yo miro las escuelas y las escuelas siempre tienen un perfil de su parte académica. Busqué a todos los que están por aquí porque hay como tres escuelas. Si quiero un buen hijo con una buena base académica, me pareció que Laredo era como el estándar que estaba buscando.

Raquel: I had academic goals for Daniel in the 4-year program, I want to know if the 4-year program met those goals that you had for Daniel. [...] Before I put Daniel in school, I looked for the best schools online. The school with the best academic record for primary school children was Laredo Elementary school. I have always been very dedicated to my children's school, looking for the best for them.

Interviewer: OK. What did you mean by "record"?

Raquel: Well, I look at the schools and the schools always have a profile of their academic part. I looked for all the ones around here because there are about three schools. If I want a good son with a good academic foundation, it seemed to me that Laredo was like the standard that I was looking for.

Raquel narrowed her three options down to one school after researching each school's academic profile. The school website informed her decision in that it allowed her to choose the school that aligned with her beliefs and values related to academic learning.
To summarize, parents used more than one resource to gain information about their children’s 4K and subsequent grades. However, it did not mean that parents used all types of information to make their 4K decisions. Across race, class, and gender, many parents generally relied on information they gained from their social circles, their 4K child’s siblings’ experiences, and their district. Yet, parents who gained information from their social circles were more likely to be mothers whose income levels were above the FPT. I also found that parents, who wanted to use special education services and language programs, were more likely to rely on information from districts and 4K child’s sibling’s experiences. In addition, location resources helped parents’ decision-making. I found that parents, who chose their residential areas after learning about their children’s schools/district, tended to be parents whose income levels were above the FPT, while parents, who simply selected the school in their neighborhood, were more likely to be FRL-eligible parents.

2. Parents’ time and financial resources made their children’s 4K work.

Parents’ time and financial resources enabled their children to access a half-day 4K and wrap-around care. I found that this was closely related to their gender and class, which added another layer to their privileges and disadvantages resulting from their race and children’s language needs and special needs.

1) Time-related resources

Almost all mothers and fathers in this subgroup analysis held their employment during the day, which gave them a scheduling conflict with half-day 4K. For this reason, they needed

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44 I explained the information that parents of children with special needs used in the section of “Parents of children with special needs prioritized their children’s needs and availability of special education services.”: They gained 4K information when they used district special education services in 3K.
not only wrap-around care but also transportation that would transport their children from 4K to wrap-around care.

Almost all working mothers whose income levels were above the FPT were successful in securing both district transportation and wrap-around care, eliminating their need to transport their children during work hours. However, they made varied accommodations to make 4K happen before enrollment. I will first explain how three parents of children with special needs made accommodations. For example, Mei — an Asian, employed mother whose income level was above the FPT — had to work around the half-day 4K hours if her family wanted to make this work. They had to make sure that the transportation was provided between 4K and their current home daycare center:

**Mei:** The school schedule, no matter where we go, we're kind of just stuck with whatever it is. And then, we have to schedule around that. [...] There was a morning and afternoon. We wanted afternoon sessions. But because he was an internal transfer, we didn't really get an option. They just dumped him in the morning, which is totally fine., I like that better in the end. It worked out.

**Interviewer:** So, after morning 4K, you, either you or your husband could pick him up?

**Mei:** He was provided transportation to daycare. That's part of the reason why we picked that place, too, because of transportation. It was close enough that the school district was agreeable to taking him to our daycare. [...] They drove him directly to our daycare babysitter’s. [...] So, around 11:30 or something, he would get dropped off. So, they would pick him up in the parking lot. He'd get there, eat his lunch right away, and then take a nap. Then, we would pick him up around 5:00- 5:30. I get out of work at 4:30, so I will go over there and by the time I get there, it's around five o'clock.

The half-day 4K was not ideal for Mei’s family. However, as I explained earlier in the section on the availability of special education services, her child’s special needs were prioritized in her family’s 4K decision. For this reason, her family was willing to accommodate what was given. Later in the interview, she shared that she had to drop her child off at the school in the morning because the district did not provide transportation from home to 4K but from 4K to the home daycare center in the afternoon. 4K access would have been tough without the two arrangements:
her family’s provision of transportation in the morning and the district transportation connecting a 4K site to wrap-around care which also worked for her work schedule. This was similar in the case of Nora, who is a White, single, employed mother and has a child with special needs; her income level was above the FPT. Both district transportation and wrap-around care were essential for her child to successfully attend a) three, half-days of phonology school at Mills Elementary school, b) four, half-days 4K at Lagos Elementary school (her child’s kindergarten school), and c) wrap-around care during her work hours. Different types of disadvantages (e.g., 4K hours, parents’ time resources, and child’s special needs) made her child experience multiple transitions during the day and the week; thankfully, the district transportation was provided.

Then, what would happen when parents did not have transportation but wrap-around care arrangements? Adita — a Black, employed mother whose income level was above the FPT—was willing to transport her child from 4K to preschool because of her satisfaction with her child’s special education services in 4K:

We opted to use the elementary 4K. We would go pick her up from 4K, bring her to the preschool, and still pay full price for the preschool even though she was going to Madison for half a day. Yeah, so, it was a really good experience. Because of that, the programming and how much improvement I saw in my child.

Since she truly valued the special education service that her child received in the public school system, she was willing to transport her child to the preschool during her lunch break and pay the full price for wrap-around care. This inconvenience made her suggest for the district: “So start at 8:30 and end at noon. It’s easier for parents to run and pick up their kids from a quarter to noon than in the middle at 10:45 or something crazy like that. It’s much harder.” Altogether, these three employed mothers (i.e., Mei, Nora, and Adita) had to consider their limited time-related resources during the day and constraints in half-day 4K supply in addition to their children’s special needs when making their decisions.
On the other hand, another employed mother (Samantha) who does not have a child with special needs made her decision centering on her limited time-related resources and constraints in half-day 4K supply. Samantha is a multiracial single mother whose income level was above the FPT. She had to find a feasible 4K location that was close to her child’s current home-daycare center and make sure that transportation was provided between the two locations. On top of that, since she was living at the border of two different school districts, she had to think about what would provide her child with continuity in the next few years:

What ruled in Manson school was knowing that I could get transportation from school to child. [...] The first priority was keeping in with initial childcare that I didn't have to change. If I had gone to a different district, he would have had to go to a school that he wasn't going to stay at — the new establishment, and he would have had to change all his care providers. And then, he would have had to do it again for kindergarten because 4K [in the different district] isn't school-based. So, we didn't know that we would keep my child in a different district, but we knew that we could keep my mama's continuous for him and his childcare providers continuously. Those were two major factors in his day.

Even though there were multiple school options, her driving decision-making factors were the continuity of using the same wrap-around care and the district transportation, followed by her child’s educational needs.

On the one hand, FRL-eligible employed parents either had half-perfect access to the district transportation or used it to cover their wrap-around care. What’s more, their wrap-around care needs were not fully met. For example, Tammy — an FRL-eligible Black, single, employed mother — had half-full access to the district transportation and wrap-around care. Her child’s wrap-around care followed the district school calendar, meaning that both 4K and her wrap-around care would close on the same day:

Tammy: [Our wrap-around care site] does not operate in a daycare model. So, when the Madison School District is closed, they're closed.
Interviewer: Because you're a working mom.
Tammy: I'm a working mom. [...] I would have to find other childcare arrangements because they don't operate with the mentality that, "We are a childcare center.” They
operate with the mentality that, "No, we are a learning facility."

As I shared earlier, she wanted to send a particular elementary 4K location due to her beliefs/values related to diversity, culturally competent pedagogy, and the DLI kindergarten program. However, she had to pay a price: she had to find another childcare arrangement when her after-care location was closed. To top it off, transportation was also half accessible:

The pickups were easy. It was the drop-offs that were hard because someone would have to meet her at the bus, and my son would be on the bus with her, but she could not get off the bus with her brother because he is not an adult. And oh my God, let me tell you, there were days that if someone at Oakland school, I can't refer to it as a daycare, but if they didn't have staff to sufficiently cover the room that she was in, the bus driver would call me and no matter where I was in town, and I could be anywhere in town.

Transportation was provided. However, if no teachers were available to pick Tammy’s children up, she was the one who had to travel to the after-hour center to hand her children to the teachers during her work time. Then, what was the point of having transportation for her?

Now, I will explain how transportation could be used not only to transport children but also to play a role in wrap-around care. Bentlee, an FRL-eligible, Asian, employed father, used transportation for multiple purposes. He explained why he chose elementary over childcare 4K:

The cost, I'm pretty sure it was free as well because it's through the Madison Public School District. The main reasons for me were that he could bus to school with his brother. Driving was a pain. Without having the bus thing, he's 6, so he's a 15-minute drive for me [...]. I get 15 minutes before I go pick him up and he's only there for three hours. So, we're talking about two and a half hours, maybe two hours if I have to stop and get gas one day, three days a week off. That really doesn't do much for me for trying because I do work from home. And so, if I can put him on the bus with his brother at 8 a.m., he comes home on the bus at 12:30, it saves two and a half hours a day, just because he's on the bus pretty much. So, that really helps because like I said before, we just can't afford daycare at this for these guys. It's crazy.

He could have used a childcare center to complement his limited time-related resources; however, his limited financial resources prevented him from doing it. Instead, he used district transportation to secure his work time at home. For this reason, the transportation for his family
played a role as a porter as well as wrap-around care. To wrap up, Tammy and Bentlee’s access to transportation or wrap-around care was relatively more complicated than the mothers whose income levels were above the FPT I described earlier.

Finally, switching gears to parents who stayed home or worked at night, they had relatively easy access to elementary 4K because they did not need to think about wrap-around care needs. Specifically, parents who stayed home were most likely to be mothers whose income levels were above the FPT. Grace — an employed mother whose income level was above the FPT — was able to send her child to 4K because of her husband’s night shift work schedule and mother-in-law’s help:

When I'm at work, my husband is sleeping, and my mother-in-law is the one that's here when the boys get home from school. In 4K, last year, it was half a day, so Harry would be with my mother-in-law. Usually, my mother-in-law, myself, or my husband does half the day, and at school half the day. So, it worked out very nicely.

With her husband or mother-in-law’s help, transportation was also provided as she shared in the later interview. All these arrangements made her 4K child attend a Spanish bilingual program at ease. Similarly, Alice and Jamala (stay-home mothers whose income levels were above the FPT), as well as Raquel (an FRL-eligible stay-home mother), had easier access to elementary 4K due to their flexibility in schedules. Jamala explained that her scheduling did not influence her decision:

Not really, because I was at home. At that time my daughter had just gotten back from the hospital because she was like a preemie, and she was in the hospital for 68 days. That was a lot with my mother-in-law who was here, so it wasn't that bad for the schedule. [...] I think scheduling for some people who also are working more outside of the home, can be hard. For me, I'm always at home, so it's pretty flexible.

She did not need to worry about the half-day 4K schedule because she stayed home. Later in the interview, she even shared that elementary 4K seemed to be free childcare for her.

2) Financial resources and affordability
I will now talk about how working parents considered the cost of wrap-around care. Regardless of parents’ class, parents had to look at the cost of childcare before they leaped. To take Bentlee’s (an FRL-eligible employed father) example that was introduced earlier, he selected elementary 4K over childcare 4K because he just could not afford wrap-around care for his two children. On the other hand, other FRL-eligible employed parents — Amber and Glennis — were able to enroll their child in 4K that aligned with their educational values and beliefs (i.e., school and academic readiness) because their increased income allowed their family barely enough to hire a nanny:

Glennis: We had a little bit more income because I moved into an administrator position, and plus she also transitioned into another promotion, so we were able to make that move of getting a nanny. Even at the time, we were like how we are going to be able to do this, but it all kind of happened at the same time. But I remember thinking what are other families doing that are not in the same income bracket that we're in? And we were still struggling to figure things out, even though we had a lot more income coming in.

Amber: Yes, but a lot of them had, even like one income, one parent stayed home, so there was that flexibility, they were there so they could go and pick up the other kid.

Glennis: Exactly, yes.

Having two income sources might not feel like enough for FRL-eligible parents like Amber and Glennis. Based on what they shared, they felt that parents generally could have two choices to make elementary 4K work: either sweating and hustling to pay for childcare or having one parent stay home by giving up two income sources.

FRL-eligible parents were not alone to deal with the wrap-around care cost. It was for real for parents whose income levels were above the FPT as well. For example, during the decision-making process, Elsa — an employed mother — was puzzled by not having a tuition break from a childcare center when 4K was technically free. 4K appeared to be “nothing versus full-time.”:

Interviewer: Any logistics that you can think about like scheduling and bussing?
Elsa: Logistically, just as many opportunities as are possible for sort of that wraparound care. We had the nanny at home, which was our way to address that problem, but I do think, logistically, 4K can be hard for families with two full-time working parents. The thing too that we noticed when we looked into some of the 4Ks that were in the daycares is that even though 4K is free through the public schools, you didn't necessarily get a tuition break at the daycares, which you felt like you should get the morning free, because they're in the 4K. But you still were just paying the full-time rate.

Interviewer: They charge the rest of that, but it feels like you're just paying those full tuition, right?

Elsa: Yeah. You'd enroll your kid through the school district into 4K at Sunnyside, but you still had to pay the full-time tuition rate for Sunnyside. Even though, technically, those mornings are free, right? So, that always felt a little weird. I mean, I get it, because the daycare is still watching your kids and all of that.

Interviewer: So, the 4K in Olsen elementary, you paid nothing?

Elsa: Nothing. Right, right, because it's offered through the public schools. Yeah.

Interviewer: Nothing versus full-time.

Elsa: Yeah. So, it's a little bit odd that way.

Hiring a nanny to cover her multiple children’s childcare needs after 4K hours was more cost-effective than paying a childcare center expensive tuition for 4K. Later in the interview, she shared that she hired a nanny to cover childcare on Mondays when elementary 4K closed and manage two of her children’s school schedules at reasonable costs.

Besides hiring a nanny, parents used multiple ways to save money for wrap-around care. For example, Nora, a single, employed mother whose income level was above the FPT, used childcare part-time and asked her children’s retired grandparents for help to save childcare costs for two of her children. Nora explained why she has been using childcare part-time: “I guess the price. It's so expensive to send your kids to daycare. [...] We've done full-time for both kids, but we're doing part-time three days a week and right now it's $150. Well, $300 a week [for two children]. So, I pay $150 for it and that's only three days a week.” In addition to expensive childcare costs, having to cover childcare costs for two children was unbearable for parents like Nora and Elsa.
Altogether, many parents, including mothers of 4K children, were employed, so they generally had limited time-related resources and experienced constraints in half-day 4K supply. In case they had children with special needs, another layer of accessibility was added to their limited time and the constraints in the 4K supply. For this reason, they had to compromise on what they preferred and accommodate a school-friendly 4K schedule to make 4K work in every way. On the other hand, stay-home mothers had relatively easy access to elementary 4K without having to worry about hustle and bustle; their income levels were more likely to be above the FPT.

In addition, the analysis demonstrates that elementary 4K was not truly free for employed mothers and fathers because of additional costs for wrap-around care and the use of a non-district form of transportation. Indeed, childcare costs were a big budget for their household regardless of their class. However, this was not found in the stories of stay-home mothers whose income levels were above the FPT like Jamala’s. They were less likely to talk about their time and financial resources as 4K decision-making factors. These findings illustrated the privileges and disadvantages that parents got depending on how their employment, gender, and budget interacted together in their decision-making processes. For this reason, these factors (i.e., employment, gender, and budget) should be considered as another layer of parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K, as this can be the key systematic opportunity or barrier for families to access elementary 4K.

Lastly, parents’ informational sources generally narrowed their 4K options down to a few. Many parents used social resources to gain 4K information across race, class, and gender of parents and children’s language/special needs. Parents of children with language and special needs were more likely to gain information by getting into the system through their older
children’s bilingual program attendance or their children’s special education program attendance during 3K. Also, parents whose income levels were above the FPT were more likely to choose their neighborhoods after figuring out which district and school they would like to send their children to. This indicated that 4K decisions could be made quite ahead of time.

Table E17 summarizes how various parents used their informational sources and their time-related and financial resources to access half-day 4K.

[Insert Table E17]

**Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter**

Although elementary 4K parents considered all structural, process, and family context-dependent quality, what drove them to make their final decision was the latter. For them to make decisions about whether their children would attend 4K, many of them considered their children’s 4K and kindergarten readiness. In addition, parents made decisions about where to send their children for 4K based on their values/beliefs related to the following: the structure of the learning environment, school readiness development, language acquisition, and public schooling (e.g., diversity and affordability). Also, parents of children with special and language needs were more likely to make their decisions based on the availability and continuity of programs and services. Since they considered a relatively smaller number of 4K locations than the parents without their children’s language and special needs, this supports the finding from Table E14, which I discussed in the main story of surveyed parents’ decision-making. These types of educational beliefs and values have not usually been discussed as quality components in the field of early childhood education because they have been considered subjective or inconsistent. However, families’ values related to family context-dependent quality critically influenced their 4K decisions rather than structural and process quality.
In addition, to figure out which 4K program had high quality, parents referenced their locational and social resources such as their neighborhoods, social networks, and previous experiences at district schools. Their information sources narrowed their options down to a few particular 4K options (i.e., one to three), which were already filtered through their beliefs and values as well as opinions of their social networks. This supports the low numbers of 4K locations parents considered in Table E14 which I introduced in the main story of surveyed parents’ decision-making.

Parents were then faced with figuring out how to make 4K work. Family context-dependent quality factors — childcare cost, 4K location, 4K hours, transportation, and parents’ beliefs/values — directly related to how much 4K supply aligned with parents’ resources to access high-quality 4K that they defined. Specifically, the biggest barrier employed parents faced was the half-day 4K schedule because of their work commitments during the day across race, class, and gender of parents. On top of wrap-around care arrangements, parents also had to arrange transportation if the district bus was not provided between 4K and after-care locations. However, parents who stayed home or had flexible schedules had relatively easy access to 4K; the analysis also indicated that stay-home parents were more likely to be mothers whose income levels were above the FPT. Moreover, childcare costs and affordability mattered across class; this finding aligns with the one in Table E14 because parents’ moderate-high levels of stress did not vary much by their class45.

Based on the analysis, I argue that the meanings of 4K quality to elementary 4K parents were mostly the following in no specific order: a) either affordable, full day 4K options or at least availability of district transportations that connect 4K to wrap-around care, b) availability of

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45 Across all cases, the elementary 4K parents showed less of a gap by class than any other cases in terms of moderate-high stress levels in their decision-making.
4K at their home elementary schools, c) the structure of learning environments that support their children’s readiness, d) availability and quality of bilingual/DLI and special education programs/services, and e) diversity. Their meanings of quality showed intersections of parents’ race and class, and children’s language needs and special needs. Moreover, parents’ definitions of quality reflected both their needs and their children’s needs.

I argue that the meaning of 4K accessibility to the elementary 4K parents was complex. For accessibility, parents’ employment, gender, and budget intersected simultaneously. Their notions of accessibility reflected how much they could find a coordination or intersection point among hours, costs, availability of 4K at their home schools, and availability of transportation. That is, accessibility for them was to have affordable 4K options that were available at their convenient hours at their preferred elementary schools or at least have transportation that easily connected a half-day 4K location to their wrap-around care.
Chapter 6: Childcare 4K
Definition of the Case and Context of Childcare 4K

The case presented in this chapter is parents who opted for childcare 4K in Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). To help with the contextualized understanding of parental decision-making, I will now explain childcare 4K operation (e.g., its schedules, tuition, curriculum, and transportation). This will help to better understand how parental childcare 4K enrollment was situated in their life contexts and local 4K supply.

4K in MMSD is provided at elementary school sites and community-based Early Care and Education sites including childcare centers and Head Start programs. Childcare 4K operation can vary compared to elementary and Head Start 4K in many ways. To begin with, childcare 4K can discreetly select their curriculum but the curriculum should be play-based and align with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) like elementary 4K; also, childcare 4K uses the same assessment as elementary 4K such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and Teaching Strategies GOLD (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.c). In addition, Early Care and Education centers follow the requirements of accreditation; their ratios are no more than 1:10, and the number of children cannot exceed more than 20 (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.c). Teacher’s licensure requirements in childcare 4K are the same as elementary 4K (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, n.d.e).

Furthermore, childcare 4K parents talked a lot about issues with schedules, tuition, and transportation. Several Early Care and Education sites that are partnered with the district provide full-day programming. Since each Early Care and Education site has its own hours of programming, the district website instructs parents to directly contact individual childcare centers for any inquiries about its programming. Moreover, although childcare centers do not charge tuition for 4K time to parents, parents still have to pay full tuition regardless of the hours
they are using. This is because the district’s per-pupil reimbursement is far less than the overall operating cost of childcare centers. Therefore, supplementing the gap in their operating costs with full-tuition parents paid is one of their main revenues to deal with the gaps in finance. Also, childcare 4K parents are often responsible for providing transportation themselves. For parents who wish to use both elementary 4K and wrap-around care, transportation from elementary 4K and childcare centers for wrap-around care can be provided if the center is within the boundary of transportation and the pick-up/drop-off locations correspond.

Some childcare centers participate in YoungStar to ensure the high quality of their childcare service. If childcare centers decide to participate in YoungStar, they can receive support from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families for tools and training to deliver high-quality care as well as financial incentives for high-quality childcare. The 4K hour at childcare centers is not eligible for a YoungStar rating while one or more hours of childcare portion of the program outside 4K hours can be counted for YoungStar purposes. In addition, childcare centers that receive Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy funding are required to participate in YoungStar (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, n.d.a). For this reason, parents who are eligible for subsidy can opt in childcare centers participating in Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy funding. Also, to get more information about the quality of childcare centers, parents can look for the quality ratings of centers through the YoungStar website (i.e., information about licensure and compliance with health and safety standards).

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46 Parents in Dane County where MMSD is located pay $16,240/year for infant care and $12,783/year for 4-year-old care. The median income of parents who use infant care is $115,177 while the median income of parents who use 4-year-old care is approximately $115,162. Compared to the average costs of infant and 4-year-old care in Wisconsin, the costs in Dane County are 0.7% higher for infant care and 0.3% higher for 4-year-old care (Childcare Aware of America, 2019).
47 YoungStar is a program operated by the Department of Children and Families to improve the quality of childcare (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, n.d.a).
48 https://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov
However, YoungStar does not provide quality information for elementary 4K because elementary 4K programs without wrap-around care are not eligible to participate in YoungStar. In the current study, many childcare 4K parents referenced quality ratings for their 4K decisions.

**Families in Childcare 4K**

Before examining why and how parents enrolled their children in childcare 4K, I present who the families are in this case. Table C1 below demonstrates descriptive statistics of survey respondents and interview participants who enrolled their children in childcare 4K. Approximately 22% of the survey respondents (122 out of 556) and 27% of the interview participants (14 out of 51) selected childcare 4K. Also, around 61% of interview participants (31 out of 51) happened to participate in both the survey and interview; among those 31 parents, 9 parents selected childcare 4K.

[Insert Table C1]

As indicated in Table C1, most childcare 4K parents were females, children’s mothers. Also, childcare 4K parents were more likely to be highly educated White whose income fell above the Federal Poverty Thresholds (FPT). Compared to the survey respondents, interview participants were more likely to be racially diverse and Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)-eligible. What’s more, compared to elementary 4K children, children with limited English proficiency or special needs were less likely to attend childcare 4K.

To understand families’ 4K decision-making experiences transversally, I will now explain their childcare experiences before a 4K year and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range. Table C2 below demonstrates children’s kindergarten enrollment age range and parents’ answers to the closed-ended survey and interview questions about their children’s
childcare experiences during the 0-3 years. Since parents were able to share multiple childcare arrangements, an individual family’s childcare sources indicated could be more than one.

[Insert Table C2]

As indicated in Table C2, most parents, in this case, used childcare centers and had their children stay at home during their 0-3 years. Also, their children’s kindergarten entrance age range was between 5.01 and 6.05.

**Quality Components that Parents Considered for Their 4K Decisions**

Childcare 4K parents considered all structural, process, and family context-dependent quality components for their decisions. Compared to elementary 4K parents, they talked more about structural and process quality. However, it was the family context-dependent quality that was mostly prioritized in their decision-making process.

**Structural quality**

Four childcare 4K parents shared that they considered structural quality when making their 4K decisions about where to send their children. The structural quality they considered included the childcare center’s accreditation, class size, and teachers’ years of experience. These parents were more likely to be White (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%) and to hold B.A/More degrees (75%). Their children neither had limited English proficiency nor special needs.

Two parents made sure that their childcare 4K was accredited before making their 4K decisions. For example, Maureen — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — made her 4K decision when she looked for her child’s childcare center for 0-3 years:

Most of the important decision-making came when we chose a childcare facility for our child when she was 2.5 years old. It was important to us at that point that the center had accredited 4K, but essentially our actual decision around where to attend 4K was already made by the time she was of age to do so.
Similarly, another parent, Mindy — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — also looked at whether her child’s preschool was accredited when she made her decision about a childcare care setting for 0-3 years: “Because we needed all day care, we enrolled our daughter in 4K at her preschool which was an accredited program and prepared her well academically and socially.” Based on what Maureen and Mindy shared, they checked the quality of care by looking at the center’s accreditation.

Furthermore, one parent considered the size of the classroom. Alex — a White father whose income level was above the FPT — had a son who had attended the same childcare center before and during 4K. He made his 4K decision based on his perception that his childcare 4K would be provided “in a larger and school-like environment.” He thought being in a larger classroom would be helpful for his son to practice skills that he needed to work on: “These areas [(academic, social-emotional, physical, and school readiness)] were areas my child struggled with, and I wanted him to have practice with them in a larger and school-like environment before attending elementary school.” Like one of the elementary 4K parents, Alex also believed that his child’s 4K had a larger room which was good for his son’s needs.

Lastly, Tori, a White mother whose income level was above the FPT, chose childcare 4K over elementary 4K because of her belief that childcare 4K teachers’ experiences would be better than elementary 4K teachers’: “I made the decision based mainly on the early childhood focus of preschool versus an elementary site. The resources available at a preschool and the teacher’s experience in the age group was the biggest factor.” Teachers’ years of experience in a particular age group were important for Tori. She also believed that that would be obtained at childcare 4K. She later shared that this belief was shaped because of her teaching experience at a private school.
Table C3 summarizes structural quality components that childcare 4K parents considered for their 4K decisions. Some of these structural quality components were based on their perceptions rather than absolute facts or measurements.

[Insert Table C3]

**Process quality**

Seven parents considered process quality components when making their decisions mostly about where to send their children for 4K. Process quality they considered were the following: teachers’ knowledge of content and expertise, inclusive and caring environment, teachers’ individualized instruction and attention, and a balance of child-led and teacher-led instruction. These parents were more likely to be White (71%) whose income levels were above the FPT (86%) with B.A/More degrees (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (14%) and did not have special needs.

For example, parents explained different kinds of instructional quality they looked for when making their decisions. Paul, a Latinx father, chose to continue using his current childcare because his family was “already pleased with the talents, knowledge, and expertise of the educators there.” Another parent, Oscar — a White father — chose childcare 4K for his child who had stayed at home before 4K because his family was “unsure if there would be individual attention and [had] concern for him [to be] in the public school system.” In addition, Harris — a White father — shared his preferred instructional quality after his oldest and youngest (4K child) children experienced 4K:

Our older child attended 4K in an MMSD school. Although my child enjoyed it, I felt it was a little too child-led. [...] I thought that his time in the classroom could have been better spent with some free choice and some more teacher-initiated learning. Our second son, the one the survey is asking about, went to his preschool which was a community site for 4K. I felt that he got a much more well-rounded experience at the community site and that the teachers actively looked for ways to balance child-led and teacher-led
activities.

His previous 4K experience with his oldest child informed him about the instructional quality of elementary 4K and then affected his 4K decision about childcare 4K for the youngest. Based on his satisfaction with instructional quality at childcare 4K, we can see what he looked for when making his 4K decision.

Lastly, the rest of the parents — White fathers — looked for an inclusive and caring environment during their decision-making processes. Specifically, they wanted to have “nurturing teachers,” “a play-based curriculum where [there] child [would feel] safe and loved,” and a “program [that would] create a safe, caring community in which all individuals are welcome and valued [rather than focusing on academic readiness].”

Table C3 summarizes the process quality that childcare 4K parents considered when making their decisions:

[Insert Table C3]

**Family context-dependent quality that reflects key constructs in the accommodations framework**

All parents considered family context-dependent quality. They considered a) children’s readiness and types of learning environment, b) continuity and familiarity with their current childcare centers, and c) availability of special education services.

1. **Readiness:** Parents considered their children’s readiness and the type of learning environment for their 4K decisions.

Childcare 4K parents enrolled their children in 4K to let them develop kindergarten and school readiness through 4K. They then specifically wanted their children to develop readiness in
the specific type of learning environment or at the same childcare center they had been using. This led them to decide where to send their children.

1) Parents’ ideas about kindergarten readiness influenced their decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K.

Childcare 4K parents (n=32) talked about 4K as a stepping stone for their children to develop academic and social-emotional readiness for kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness development was their 4K goal, influencing their decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K.

Less than half of the parents (n=12) out of 32 parents considered both social-emotional and academic readiness for their decisions. This group of parents was more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT (92%) with B.A/More degrees (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (33%) and special needs (0%). As an example, Arden, whose child had been using the same childcare center before a 4K year, was confident that 4K at the same location would support her child’s kindergarten readiness:

We were aware that 4K is focused on academics. Since we knew and had confidence in our daughter's teachers, we expected that this wouldn't detract from the general focus on social-emotional development that we so valued at our daughter's preschool. Our daughter already knew her letters and numbers and so we hoped that in the 4K program she would be encouraged to develop her literacy and numeracy skills even further. The 4K program also gave us confidence that our daughter will be able to meet all expectations about school readiness at the end of the 4K year. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above Limited English Proficiency (LEP) level, Without Special Education (Sped) needs)

Arden indicated her perceptions about the focus of the 4K curriculum, which was academics. Not only did she expect 4K to further her daughter’s current academic readiness, but she was also convinced that 4K teachers would support her daughter’s social-emotional readiness based on her observations of teachers before the 4K year. She recalled her daughter's 4K experience as
positive which gave her a firm foundation of both dimensions in kindergarten readiness. In addition to Arden, many parents in this group also continued using the same site for 4K because they knew that the center had been supporting both readiness areas well.

In addition, slightly more than half of the parents (n=18) out of 32 parents prioritized their children’s social-emotional readiness for kindergarten when making decisions. This group of parents was more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT (92%) with B.A/More degrees (95%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (28%) and special needs (22%). Lawrence made his 4K decision after making sure his current childcare center was the right fit for his child to develop social-emotional readiness:

We weren't concerned with language development, motor skills, etc., but did want to make sure our son's 4K program was a supportive environment that taught emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and social skills. We talked to the teachers about the curriculum, and we were pleased that it contained a lot of this material. We observed the class on a few occasions and talked to the teachers before deciding the program was right for him. This was a program at the same daycare center where he received care the year before 4K. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Lawrence’s family wanted their children to develop emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and social skills through 4K. Since his son had been using the same childcare center, his family was able to easily observe materials and class and talk to teachers about their son’s readiness before making their decision. The rest of the 17 parents besides Lawrence also wanted their children to develop social-emotional readiness; their definitions of social-emotional readiness included “preparing for the social scene,” “empathy-building,” “forging peer-to-peer relationships,” and “interpersonal skills.”
Lastly, very few parents (n=2) considered their children’s academic readiness for their decisions. These parents were more likely to be under-resourced compared to the two previous groups of parents. For example, Elijah made a decision that could support his child’s learning needs: “I wanted my child to be able to recognize the alphabet and know his numbers” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Elijah wanted his child’s 4K to support literacy and math learning.

Table C4 shows how various parents, including Arden, Lawrence, and Elijah, talked about how their ideas about social-emotional and academic readiness influenced their decision-making:

2) Parents’ ideas about school readiness influenced their decisions mostly about whether their children would attend 4K.

Unlike elementary 4K parents, childcare 4K parents (n=20) talked less about location-specific school readiness (i.e., familiarizing with a school building and people at their home elementary school). Instead, they wanted their children to learn about classroom rules and have continued friendships in a radius of a neighborhood elementary school. Their decisions were mostly related to whether their children would attend 4K.

More than half of the parents (n=13) expressed their hope for their children’s school readiness development using the generic term, “school readiness.” This group of parents was more likely to be White (77%) whose income levels were above the FPT (83%) with B.A/More degrees (100%). Their children did not have special needs, and 54% of children had limited English proficiency. For example, James, whose child had used a childcare center before a 4K

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49 This group of parents was more likely to be FRL-eligible, White (100%) and have children without special needs (0%).
year, decided to enroll his son in 4K to further his school readiness: “I wanted him to continue to develop [readiness skills to be successful in school], although overall, he was ahead of where he needed to be entering 4K, so I had no concerns” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). It was clear that he did not want his child to stop developing the school readiness that he had been working on in the previous years.

In addition, five parents out of 20 enrolled their children in 4K for them to learn about classroom rules and what the school setting was about. This group of parents was more likely to be White (80%) whose income levels were above the FPT (60%) with B.A/More degrees (60%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (40%) and special needs (20%). For instance, George thought about how to support his child who had not used a formal childcare setting before 4K for school readiness: “I wanted to make sure that my child learned about classroom routines, cleaning up and that there were times the teacher emphasized paying good attention” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). This indicates that 4K enrollment was for his child to learn about classroom routines, rules, and expectations.

Lastly, two out of 20 parents thought about how to provide their children with continued friendships that would last even after entering kindergarten. Specifically, they pondered whether their children’s peers would go to the same kindergarten or live in the same neighborhood before making decisions. For this reason, unlike other parents I explained earlier, these two parents considered where to send their children for 4K. This group of parents was White with B.A/More degrees (100%) and had children without limited English proficiency and special needs (0%); one of the parents’ income level was above the FPT. For example, Autumn made a strategic
move about a 4K location because she wanted her daughter to have continued friendships with peers in her attendance area:

I knew that my child would attend 4K at a site other than the daycare she had been at (they were not a 4K site). I knew my child could easily adapt to a new environment, so I was open to moving her to another site. I wanted her to attend 4K where she would be with other students in our neighborhood (her daycare was on the other side of town). If her daycare had included students from our attendance area, I probably would have had her remain there, instead of moving her to a different 4K site. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Autumn’s 4K decision was focused on which location was good for her daughter to socialize with neighborhood peers, which would provide familiarity after entering the home elementary school. For this reason, her child’s previous daycare center was not a good option because it did not have any children living in their attendance area.

Table C5 shows how various parents, including James, George, and Autumn, talked about how their ideas about school readiness influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table C5]

3) **Parents believed the loose structure of a 4K learning environment would support their children’s readiness.**

Childcare 4K parents (n=13) used their beliefs and values related to the loose structure of the learning environment when making their decisions. The loose structure was described as “play-based,” “outside unstructured time,” “[environment] with social-emotional learning,” and “[not] heavily structured, academic program.” This led them to consider where to send their children to develop academic, social-emotional, and school readiness. This group of parents was more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT with B.A/More degrees (92%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (38%) and special
needs (8%). For example, Dan decided to keep his child in the same childcare center because he was against a heavily structured academic learning environment:

At this stage, I was primarily concerned with my child developing socio-emotional skills and being in a warm, nurturing environment. I chose the school where I thought these needs would best be met, which happened to be the program he was already at. I did not want to force my child into a heavily structured, 'academic' program at such a young age. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Dan’s preference for a loosely structured learning environment was clear when he described his child’s childcare center as an emotionally safe and supportive place for social-emotional readiness development. For this reason, he chose to stay in the same center for 4K.

On the one hand, some parents made sure their current childcare centers had a semi-structured environment that had both structure and non-structure. For example, Camille used her conceptualization of the ideal 4K structure when deciding whether she wanted to keep her child in her current childcare center: “I think that 4K is a fundamental opportunity for children to begin to understand the structure of formal education in a safe environment while still allowing children to explore and have a free play” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Camille believed that 4K was a place where children could learn a structure of learning while having explorative learning and free play. This indicates that the 4K structure that she conceptualized was somewhere between structure and non-structure. She ended up staying at the current childcare center due to its semi-structured learning environment.

Table C6 shows how various parents, including Dan and Camille, talked about how their ideas about the structure of the learning environment influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table C6]

2. Values and beliefs related to continuity and familiarity: Parents decided to stay at their current childcare centers for both parents’ and children’s needs.
Many childcare 4K parents (n=59) preferred continuing the use of their current childcare centers for 4K for two reasons. One, familiarity with their center led them to remain in their current status rather than having unnecessary changes. Two, continuity provided fewer transitions for both children and parents. For this reason, these parents’ decisions came down to where to send their children.

1) Parents tended to resist changes unless their childcare centers had red flags.

Parents (n=28) made decisions based on their preferences for familiarity with their current childcare centers. They tended to remain in their current status unless they were not satisfied with their previous experiences. This group of parents was more likely to be White (75%) whose income levels were above the FPT (89%) with B.A/More degrees (96%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (43%) and special needs (4%). Taking one of the parents’ stories as an example, Zack described his 4K decision as an easy decision because his satisfaction with the childcare center did not even bother him searching for other 4K options:

For us the 4K decision was easy: 4K was offered throughout the childcare center and we were already pleased with the talents, knowledge, and expertise of the educators there. We did not research any other 4K programs because 4K was offered within our normal childcare setting. (Childcare, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

For Zack, not only did 4K provided within his childcare setting make his decision easy, but his satisfaction also gave him strong confidence about his choice.

As Zack explained, many childcare 4K parents (n=31) used information that they gathered from their first-hand experiences as “current childcare customers” rather than referring to quality ratings provided by YoungStar. This group of parents had a similar background as

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50 This group of parents was more likely to be White (77%) whose income levels were above the FPT (90%) with B.A/More degrees (97%). Their children did not have special needs (0%) and were slightly less likely to have limited English proficiency (42%).
parents who preferred the continuity that I described above. Like Zack, Steven used the empirical information that he gathered from his child’s previous experiences during the 0-3 years when making his 4K decision: “I selected the 4K program because it was the same place where he went to early childcare, and I know empirically that they are a great team of professionals that will help my son to thrive in all aspects” (Childcare, Latinx, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Both Zack and Steven had chances to informally observe how their children’s teachers had been supporting their children. It led them to trust the instructional quality of the teachers and continue using the same childcare center. For this reason, these childcare 4K parents were able to learn about their childcare center’s process quality before 4K; on the other hand, this was hard for elementary 4K parents because they rarely had a chance to observe it first-hand.

Table C7 summarizes how various parents, including Zack and Steven, made decisions based on their preferences for familiarity:

[Insert Table C7]

2) **Parents continued using their current childcare centers to allow their children and parents themselves to have less transitions and disruptions.**

Parents (n=13) enrolled their children in their current childcare for 4K to avoid multiple transitions for their children. This group of parents was more likely to be White (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (92%) with B.A/More degrees (85%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (15%) and special needs (8%). For example, Rick explained why his 4K decision was the best option for his family:

> We kept our son in the program at his daycare. We considered MMSD [elementary 4K], but no program was available at his kindergarten site, and we didn't want him to transition to two different schools. Also, transportation mid-day would have been very challenging for us. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP
level, Without Sped needs)

Rick calibrated the costs and benefits of sending his child to elementary 4K. However, the caveat was the unavailability of 4K at his child’s kindergarten school. If he sent his child to a different elementary 4K, his child then had to have unnecessarily multiple transitions from his current childcare, a different elementary school for 4K, to a home elementary school for kindergarten. Moreover, staying at the same center eliminated the transportation issue that he needed to deal with in the middle of the day. The continuity of using the same center was good for his whole family’s well-being.

Like Rick, childcare 4K parents (n=4) gave thought to elementary 4K but stayed at their current childcare centers due to the unavailability of 4K at their preferred elementary school. This decision was for their children to have fewer transitions. This group of parents was white whose income levels were above the FPT with B.A/More degrees. Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (25%) and special needs (25%). These parents’ decisions were the second-best option for families like Rick’s because staying at their current childcare center would prevent them from hopping from one school to a different school in two years. It was their accommodations to 4K supply.

In addition, as Rick explained, many employed parents (n=14) handled their limited time-related resources during the day by enrolling their children in childcare 4K. Attending full-day, childcare 4K solved both their schedule and transportation issues that they would have experienced if they sent their children to elementary 4K and wrap-around care. These 14 parents were more likely to be White (93%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%) with B.A/More degrees (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency
(35%) and special needs (7%). Abby — a single mother — shared why having on-site wrap-around care was important for her decision:

Having on-site wrap-around care that provided an early enough start and went late enough into the afternoon was a primary concern. I am a single parent and needed to be sure I could drop off and pick up my daughter while getting to work on time and leaving work late enough. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Without having an additional person in her household to support her childcare needs, she had to make sure to find wrap-around care that had a compatible operating schedule with her work hours.

However, it was not the issue only for single mothers who did not have any family support. Both parents working full-time also shared that their limited time resources made them have a few 4K options to consider. Leo shared his family’s decision-making: “In a family where both parents work full time, we felt like our choices were very limited to where we could have full-time care. After looking into a few half-day programs, we ended up choosing a site where full-day care was an option” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Leo’s family’s decision was not truly a choice. Even though they considered a few half-day programs, they could not access them due to their full-time childcare needs. As a suggestion for the district, Sam shared how the district could address those parents’ time-related resources and unavailability of affordable, full-day 4K:

The times offered through MMSD — half days, 4 days/week — are completely incompatible with a work schedule. Since we would need to find childcare for the remainder of the work week, we ended up going with a community site and paying steep tuition. I wish that there were better offerings to bridge the free MMSD 4K with other centers or in-home programs for the rest of the time. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Half-day, 4 days a week was not compatible with Sam’s family’s work schedules. As a result, enrolling his child in expensive childcare 4K was what he had to do. He wished the district had
offered an option that allowed families to use free half-day, elementary 4K and wrap-around care without paying full tuition. This indicates that the cost of wrap-around care could be an additional burden even for families whose incomes were above the FPT.

Table C7 shows how various parents, including Rick, Abby, Leo, and Sam, talked about how families accommodated their limited time resources and 4K supply constraints during their decision-making processes:

[Insert Table C7]

3. Special education services: Availability of special education services was prioritized for parents of children with special needs.

A couple of parents (n=2) looked for the availability of special education services in 4K for their decisions. They were White families whose income levels were above the FPT (100%); one of their children had both limited English proficiency and special needs. One of the parents, Lafael, prioritized whether her child could receive Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy during a 4K year when making the decision: “My son is on the autism spectrum and one of the biggest deciding factors for us was that our 4k site allowed his ABA therapists to attend with him for part of each day. We decided that another year of in-class ABA help would be much more beneficial for him” (Childcare, White, Above the FPT, LEP, Sped). The availability of 4K that accommodated the in-class ABA therapy at her child’s center was important for Lafael’s family. This indicates that Lafael’s decision about where to send her child for 4K depended on where the service was provided.

Table C8 shows how parents considered the availability of special education services for their decisions:

[Insert Table C8]
Different Sources of Information Parents Used to Access High-Quality 4K

Parents (n=45) used different sources of information to learn about what 4K options were available and what would be the best fit for their children’s needs. Their information sources included their current childcare centers, their childcare plans for 4K child’s younger siblings, other parents’ referrals, and parents’ work experiences.

The majority of the parents’ (n=38) decisions were related to information that they received from their current childcare center. 31 parents referenced their previous experiences at their current childcare centers for their decisions as I explained earlier. Then, seven parents considered their younger children’s childcare plans in addition to their previous experience at their 4K child’s childcare center. These parents were more likely to be FRL-eligible, White compared to the parents who referenced only their previous experiences with their childcare centers. Mila strategically made her decision considering how their 4K child’s enrollment would benefit her young child:

One of the factors that influenced our decision was that we had a 2-year-old starting preschool the year our older daughter was starting kindergarten. Having our older daughter do the 4K program at our preschool allowed us to be a "current" family when registering our younger daughter for preschool, so we got priority registration.

(Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

For the 4K decision, Mila considered two things: the childcare plan for her younger child and the benefit that the childcare center provided to their “current” family. Mila was able to gain this information easily because her family had been using the center. As a result, her younger child was able to get into the same center without getting waitlisted. Moreover, another parent, Joon,

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51 This group of parents was more likely to be White (77%) whose income levels were above the FPT (90%) with B.A/More degrees (97%). Their children did not have special needs (0%) and were slightly less likely to have limited English proficiency (42%).

52 This group of parents was more likely to be White (86%) whose income levels were above the FPT (71%) with B.A/More degrees (86%). Their children did not have limited English proficiency and special needs (0%).
also considered his younger child’s placement when enrolling his 4K child in 4K: “We probably would have attended the same 4K program even if it was okay because of the center’s location: close to home, close to work, and a younger sibling at the same center” (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Joon’s plan for having both of his children at the same center would have won even if the quality of care were mediocre. These examples demonstrate that parents’ childcare plans for their younger children and previous experiences with their childcare centers together were their critical information sources for their 4K decisions.

In addition, few other parents (n=5) referenced other parents’ referrals during their 4K search. This group of parents\textsuperscript{53} was more likely to be underserved compared to the parents who referenced information gained from their current childcare centers and childcare plans for younger children. One of the parents, Jane, consulted with local mothers: “We chose [our childcare center] because it was highly suggested by local moms and during a walk through it had everything we wanted. We are glad and would send our next child and would recommend it to others” (Childcare, Latinx, Some college, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Combined with the suggestion from local mothers, her visit to the childcare center confirmed her final decision. Jane’s satisfaction with childcare 4K made her want to continue using it for her younger child and even recommend it to other parents. This example shows how informal information in the social circle could have a ripple effect on parents’ 4K access.

Lastly, two parents recalled their work experience and expertise in their profession for their 4K decisions. This group of parents was White with B.A/More degrees and did not have

\textsuperscript{53} This group of parents was more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT with B.A/More degrees (60%). Their children did not have special education (0%) and were less likely to have limited English proficiency (40%).
children with special needs. For example, Tori used her academic background and work experience as information for her 4K decision:

I made the decision based mainly on the early childhood focus of preschool versus an elementary site. The resources available at a preschool and the teacher's experience in the age group was the biggest factor. Didn't want this to be early kindergarten. Also, my opinions were shaped largely by my background - I got my degree in elementary education at UW Madison and taught kindergarten in private schools until my oldest child was born and I have stayed at home raising my four kids since then. (Childcare, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Using the information that she learned through her work experiences, she first compared two early childhood programs at preschool and elementary school. She then enrolled her child in childcare 4K because she believed that the resources and teachers’ quality at preschool were better than the ones at elementary schools.

Table C9 shows how various parents, including Mila, Joon, Jane, and Tori, talked about how families’ sources of information influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table C9]

**Main Story of Childcare 4K Parents’ Decision-Making**

From the analysis of open-ended survey answers, I found that many childcare 4K parents’ decisions were based on where to send their children for 4K mostly due to their wrap-around care needs and familiarity with their current childcare centers. These parents who considered 4K enrollment were less likely to be under-resourced than elementary 4K according to the analysis of a closed-ended survey⁵⁴ (See Table E14 & C10). Moreover, parents of children with special needs were less likely but those of children with limited English proficiency were more likely to consider childcare 4K enrollment than elementary parents.

[Insert Table C10]

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⁵⁴ Parents were asked to report whether they thought about 4K enrollment, the number of 4K locations they considered, and the level of stress in decision-making.
When parents decided where to send their children for 4K, they used their previous experiences at their childcare centers as their reference points to gauge if it would be beneficial for both their children and parents themselves. Specifically, their previous experiences helped their decision-making because they were able to see if their center’s instructional quality was satisfying or aligned with their values and beliefs. In addition, the decision to use the same childcare center was to address parents’ limited time-related resources during the day and to provide their children with uninterrupted learning experiences. Therefore, their decisions were almost a balancing act to meet their needs and their children’s needs. Also, in case they had younger children in their family, childcare plans for their younger ones also informed their decisions about continuing the same childcare center for the whole family’s convenience. This indicates that their decisions were not simply determined by individual interests but by the whole family’s context.

Moreover, the number of 4K locations parents considered was rather limited because many parents considered continuing to use the same childcare center for practical reasons or referenced information that was already filtered through their social circles. This was supported by the analysis of a closed-ended survey (Table C10) that parents considered mostly zero to two locations. Compared to elementary 4K parents (Table E14), White parents whose income levels were above the FPT were more likely to consider less 4K locations. However, parents of children with limited English proficiency considered either more or less 4K locations compared to elementary 4K parents. Also, childcare 4K parents generally experienced higher levels of stress in decision-making compared to elementary 4K parents (Table E14 & C10). Especially, childcare 4K parents showed a relatively large gap in their high level of stress (Somewhat-Extremely) by their races (whites and parents of color), class, and special needs compared to
elementary 4K parents; White parents who did not have children with special needs and whose income levels were above the FPT were more likely to get high-level of stress.

Altogether, childcare 4K parents’ decisions were not necessarily the result of their choices but rather accommodations like parents in other cases. Childcare 4K parents considered structural (e.g., accreditation) and process quality (e.g., instructional quality) more than elementary 4K parents. Especially since many of them had been using the same childcare center before the 4K year, they were able to observe teachers’ teaching and interactions with children regularly. However, the quality that many childcare 4K parents prioritized was family context-dependent quality, which influenced their final 4K decisions. These parents addressed their limited time-related resources and 4K supply constraints by enrolling their children in childcare 4K. For this reason, their decisions were related to where to send their children for 4K.

Subgroup Analysis

Analysis of an open-ended survey gave me a bigger picture of how parents made decisions about whether and where their children would go to 4K. In the sub-group analysis, I chose representative parents who best illustrated the main story of childcare 4K parents’ decision-making with particular attention to their race, class, and gender as well as their children's language and special needs. Table C11 demonstrates the profiles of families who will be presented in the subgroup analysis.

[Insert Table C11]

Parents’ decisions about whether to send their children for 4K

Childcare 4K parents contemplated whether their children would go to 4K. They shared why their children needed to attend 4K and how they hoped 4K would support their children’s
social-emotional, academic, and school readiness. In this section, I will discuss how various childcare parents considered their beliefs/values related to readiness for their decisions.

1. Kindergarten readiness: Parents wanted their children to develop kindergarten readiness through 4K.

   1) Academic readiness

   Parents, who considered their children’s academic readiness for 4K decisions, were more likely to be FRL-eligible, mothers of color. They wanted their children to have a structured learning environment for academic learning. Katalia, Clara, and Tamar explained how they arranged 4K or summer 4K placement to achieve their goals.

   Katalia — an FRL-eligible Latinx mother — sent her son to summer 4K after her childcare 4K experience because she felt that childcare 4K was not enough to prepare for her son’s academic readiness. However, the summer 4K was far from her satisfaction. She explained this when asked about how the summer 4K was different from the ideal 4K she conceptualized:

   Later when he was at the summer 4K, it was different because they didn’t teach him those things as far as letter sounds, but they did give him a nap I believe. I just don’t think that they prepared him as much as I thought that they would have for the kindergarten program that he was going into. And I don’t think they gave me enough information about what it was that he was learning in the first place. Like in kindergarten now, the teacher sends out a weekly letter about what they’ve gone over that week, what they’re working on next week, and what’s going on. It’s a detailed letter she sends for math, science, and reading. This is what they did. When his teacher lets me know that, then that week I work on those same things with him in a different way. [...] So, working on the same things, strengthening the things that he’s working on in class, but doing it in a way out in the world that’s practical, so that way he can practice it. [The teachers] didn’t do that in 4K. I wish they would have ‘because that would have been great.

   Katalia shared that her son’s summer 4K program did not teach him letter sounds which were part of kindergarten readiness. She also pointed out how her son’s academic readiness could have been strengthened in a collaboration with a teacher. She wished that the 4K teachers sent out a weekly letter about children’s learning so that she could have supported it at home as well.
She believed that this led her son unprepared before entering kindergarten. This type of realization did not come across until her son’s kindergarten year:

When my kid got to kindergarten, I think he was a little behind, even though I regularly took him to the pediatrician and he was saying, “He’s on target.” […]. Most of the children in kindergarten were already ahead of him in certain areas. […] So, he knew his number and he knew the alphabet, but he didn’t know how to put letter sounds with the letters to able to sound a word out and other children who were in kindergarten did and why is that? It’s because of the programs that they were in before kindergarten. So, I wish that the programs in 4K would strengthen or harp on what they are gonna go over in kindergarten, so that way you don’t start off behind because your program doesn’t offer X, Y, and Z.

Katalia gauged her son’s readiness by comparing it to other children’s readiness rather than relying on his pediatrician’s statement. This led her to trace back to her son’s 4K experience and concluded that the 4K did not prepare him enough. For this reason, later in the interview, she shared that she would make the same 4K decision but would like to be involved more in what her child was learning in 4K.

Similarly, another FRL-eligible Multiracial mother, Clara, also sent her daughter to summer 4K after childcare 4K to improve her academic readiness. However, unlike Katalia, Clara enrolled her daughter in summer 4K based on her child’s 4K teacher’s recommendation:

She’s learned a lot [of numbers, letter recognition, and writing in childcare 4K]. She needed to go to summer. She didn't necessarily need to, but [her 4K teacher] said something about math and literacy. She was a little bit behind it. So, to kind of keep her in the school pace, that's why I put them in summer school.

Although Clara felt that childcare 4K did support her daughter’s academic readiness, summer 4K was good for her to attend to work on math and literacy before kindergarten. This decision was grounded in the childcare 4K teacher’s evaluation of her child's readiness. When Clara was asked if she would make the same 4K decision, she said she would make the same decision but hoped that the 4K program would be more academically structured. She bolstered her thought by
sharing her observations of her younger child’s learning in a more academic-oriented setting at the same childcare 4K location:

The 4K taught kids stuff, but they didn't teach them as much as these kids know now. [My younger child, Mira], just by her going to early childhood, [...] and she was working with this girl, Natalie, from the school district I think it was. Mira's vocabulary has gotten ten times better. I think it's more just keeping the kids focused on what they're going to teach them what they're going to learn in kindergarten and keep updating it because everything changes every year. So, I think just kind of keeping them on track of that. At times, yes, there's time for fun and everything I knew that, but then there's a time where you have to actually focus and learn about the school.

Clara’s explanation indicates her hope for 4K to support their children’s academic readiness more rigorously rather than focusing on having fun. To recap Katalia and Clara’s stories, they re-evaluated their 4K decisions after their child’s childcare 4K, summer 4K, and kindergarten years. They all shared that they would make the same 4K decisions but wanted more structured and rigorous academic learning.

Echoing Clara’s point about the ideal 4K curriculum, Tamar — an FRL-eligible Black mother — shared her recommendations for the district:

[4K] really would prepare them more for kindergarten. I mean, ‘cause it’s like my daughter, she’s in 4K in the daycare. It's like okay, she learns in the morning and then later on they may learn, but it’s low-key playing. I mean, that’s okay, but I feel like it would just be better if it was just like a full day and then once school gets out, they make them play.

According to Tamar, a full day 4K with structured learning would be better for children to have during the day, leaving playful activities for an after-school time. Both Clara and Tamar preferred 4K which focused on learning rather than play.

2) Social-emotional readiness

Some parents — Multiracial parents whose income levels were above the FPT and FRL-eligible White parents — expected their children to develop social-emotional readiness in 4K more than an academic one, influencing their 4K decisions. Tiffany, Benson, Frida, and Mateo
shared how they made their decisions based on their beliefs/values related to social-emotional readiness.

Tiffany — an FRL-eligible White mother — enrolled her son in 4K to strengthen social-emotional readiness even though she felt that her son “was ahead of where he needed to be entering 4K and [she] had no concerns.” She explained her expectations of 4K for her son’s learning when asked how 4K prepared her son’s kindergarten:

The 4K standards for kindergarten with the common core standards have upped the reading level to a level that I don't think is appropriate for most kids. My kids have all been quite advanced and have done fine with that, but I don't think it's appropriate. I think the expectation and the push to get them there is not where kindergartners should be. I think that social-emotional development is still much more important at that age. I think they should have more time for recess, more time for free play, more time to develop friendships, and more time to work on those kinds of skill sets.

Tiffany felt that her son could handle a higher level of reading in 4K; however, she believed that the academic-focused learning in 4K should not distract children from having social-emotional learning. Throughout the interview, she constantly talked about the types of 4K environments that would support her son’s social-emotional readiness. Echoing Tiffany’s thought, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — also worried about 4K that heavily focused on academics when he enrolled his son in 4K for social-emotional readiness development:

I think overloading kids with academics early is not what we want. So, you don't want 4K to become more of that. It really should be about socio-emotional development and getting used to being in that setting. As long as they're doing that and emphasizing that, then that's what they should be doing.

Like Tiffany, Benson also expressed that he did not have any concerns about his son’s academic readiness (e.g., math and reading) based on his observations of his son. Yet, Benson felt confident that 4K supported his shy child’s social-emotional readiness so that his child eventually became both socially and emotionally as well as academically ready for kindergarten:
I think he loves reading. He's got a couple of really close friends. He's always sort of made these tight and tense friendships with other kids. So, he's got a few of those in 4K. In kindergarten, I think he's getting a lot out of it. I think he likes being in class. He likes answering questions. I've observed. I've gone in a couple of times when I'm able to volunteer. He'll raise his hand. I'm proud of his writing. They did a poetry unit. He was proud to show off his poetry, and he's proud of his work. He likes his friends. I think that he's really enjoying kindergarten. He likes the academic part of it, too. [...] We still see some of the shyness of it, too. He's a shy kid.

4K supplemented what Benson’s son needed; social-emotional readiness. A similar thing was also found in Mateo’s 4K decision-making story. He—a Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT—expected 4K to support his daughter’s social-emotional readiness because his home environment was able to support her academic learning: “I don’t think much good comes from the school. [...] She learns more reading at home than she does there, she learned more math at home, in my opinion. I mean [4K] reinforces some things. [4K] exposes some things and socially it’s very good.” In Tiffany, Benson, and Mateo’s decision-making stories, they all prioritized social-emotional learning in 4K over academics.

These kinds of beliefs and values related to social-emotional readiness were often phrased as play and hands-on activities in contrast to academic activities. This then influenced their decisions about 4K enrollment. Frida—a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT—enrolled her daughter in 4K for social-emotional readiness. She shared that her daughter’s 4K curriculum aligned with her values related to play and hands-on activities when asked about the perfect 4K setting for her child:

Frida: [In perfect 4K,] she's getting enough attention and lots of time to play. They're paying attention to her social-emotional development and paying a little bit of attention to, like, can she be ready for kindergarten after this but not so focused on getting her ready for kindergarten that she gets to go outside. That maybe she's exposed to music or art, like a diversity of activities to where she can start to experiment with different things and that there are different types of students that go there. [...]  
Interviewer: How was the Wizard 4K program similar or different compared to your ideal one?
**Frida:** I would say it met all of my expectations. Her definition of kindergarten readiness was the opposite of outdoor play and hands-on activities. This indicates that her child’s 4K focused less on sedentary learning for kindergarten but more on social-emotional learning through play. For this reason, later in the interview, she shared that she would make the same 4K decision that would help her child’s social-emotional development.

To recap what I have shared so far about the four parents, they prioritized their children’s needs in social-emotional readiness when deciding whether to enroll their children in 4K. This priority was found among FRL-eligible White and Multiracial parents whose income levels were above the FPT.

3) **Both social-emotional and academic readiness**

Lastly, Morgan and Eliana — mothers whose income levels were above the FPT — considered their children's social-emotional and academic readiness for 4K enrollment. Morgan — a White mother — shared she would make the same 4K decision because her daughter’s 4K supported both readiness areas: “I think she needed. I think the same kind of program would be good for her. So, I would probably choose it again.” She evaluated her child’s 4K experience after the kindergarten year:

The 4K program was very regimented. What she was learning at her 4K was almost what they learned in kindergarten actually. They were trying to do a lot. So, it was a little repetitive for her but at the 4K, I don't think she actually took in a lot of it because she was still learning how to learn and odd, I think, that is what ultimately helped her so much attending kindergarten because she was able to kind of self-learn and self-regulate because her classroom was a little challenging. There were quite a few children that needed extra help from the teachers and from the assistants in the classroom. So, I think she was often left to do a little bit of work on her own. So, we think her 4K really did help her get ready to do that.
Looking back, Morgan felt that the regimented 4K program was helpful in that it supported her daughter to develop self-regulation skills and foundations in academics. She believed that it made her child thrive in kindergarten which required independence in learning.

On the other hand, Eliana — an Asian mother — shared how 4K could have worked more for her child’s reading and social-emotional readiness when asked about a perfect 4K setting for her child:

_Eliana:_ Just some introduction to reading because that was a big challenge for him initially at kindergarten. I think part of it is that he has a photographic memory, so once we read a book to him, he will have memorized that book. So, his memory really helped. He was able to pick up a book and use the visual cues to see what words would be on that page. But actually, reading something completely new was very difficult for him. [...] _Interviewer:_ Did you have something particular in mind for his social-emotional development?

_Eliana:_ Yeah, this is just my child’s personality too. For some reason, he doesn’t like to be part of games or sports where it involves many people in a group. He bows out of those even like sports, playing ball, or anything. We just recently went to a birthday party, and he said, “I don’t want to play. So, he’ll stay out of that. So, I don’t know if it’s just him. It could just be him. But 4K didn’t force him. I wouldn’t have wanted them to force him, but maybe they could have found a way to facilitate a little bit better. Not to say that they didn’t try. I’m pretty sure they tried, but they didn’t push it.

Eliana’s observations on her child’s academic and social-emotional needs during the kindergarten year helped her think about what would have been helpful for her child to learn in 4K. Later in the interview, she shared that she would make the same decision but hoped that 4K could focus on both readiness dimensions. To summarize Morgan and Eliana’s stories, they both would appreciate it when 4K supports both social-emotional and academic readiness.

Altogether, parents used their varied beliefs and values related to readiness for their decision-making. Parents, who prioritized academic readiness, were more likely to be FRL-eligible mothers of color. Due to their focus on academic readiness, two out of three parents sent their children to the summer 4K after their childcare 4K experience. In addition, parents who prioritized social-emotional readiness were Multiracial whose income levels were above the FPT
and FRL-eligible White. They all contrasted the value of social-emotional readiness to the one of academic readiness. Many of them shared that their children already possessed academic readiness; for this reason, 4K was expected to complement their children's social-emotional needs. Lastly, parents who prioritized both social-emotional and academic readiness were White and Asian mothers whose income levels were above the FPT. In general, parents' decisions related to kindergarten readiness mostly differed by parents’ income.

2. School readiness: Parents’ beliefs/values related to school readiness influenced their decisions.

Parents considered whether 4K would support their children’s school readiness development when making their decisions. These parents’ definitions of school readiness were as follows: a) getting used to classroom routines and rules, b) learning about self-help skills, c) being familiar with peers/teachers and school building, and d) developing a habit of going to school. Their definitions differed by their class.

I found that parents whose income levels were above the FPT enrolled their children in 4K to let them learn about classroom rules, expectations, routines, and self-help skills. These types of learning can be done implicitly through engagement with their classroom community. For example, Morgan — a White mother — felt that her decision to move her child from part-time to full-time childcare helped her child to be better prepared for the kindergarten full-day schedule: “She had a hard time kind of adjusting because also for her it was going from two days a week of being somewhere to this was full-time, all day, every day. So, it was a little bit of an adjustment but in the long run, I think it really did help her for kindergarten.” Experience with a full-day schedule during the 4K year was a way for her daughter to gradually adjust to how to
navigate a full-day classroom schedule and what to expect. She elaborated on this when asked to describe a perfect 4K setting for her child:

I think it's definitely all-day care. So, most of the all-day care programs are really only half-day because the other half they spend playing or napping but I think the child needs to be there all day to get used to being gone all day because I think that's a big adjustment for a lot of children when they get to their kindergarten. They're not used to being gone for more than a few hours unless they've done it before. So, I think that's important.

Morgan believed that a full-day 4K would support children’s readiness by allowing them to learn what full-day school would expect them to do. Later in the interview, she made a recommendation for a district for full-day programming for this reason.

In addition, learning about predictable classroom routines and expectations was what Benson — a White father — expected his son to learn. He shared how it would help his transition to kindergarten:

We wanted that experience. That transition experience is important. And one of the things Collin is always good with is day-to-day transitions. But these sort of long-term transitions we knew were going to be really important for him. [...] He likes to know what's coming, and he likes to sort of be able to plan in the way that he plans. And so having a sense of what it looked like and what kindergarten might be like he had that. [...] I think in that way 4K was a really good experience for him to try to get that under his belt, to know what some of the routines were going to look like and get more practice working in a small group.

Benson felt that 4K really supported his son’s school readiness by letting him learn about how to work with others as a group and what routine to expect. He believed that this would prepare his child’s mindset to smoothly transition to kindergarten.

Moreover, Caitlyn — an Asian mother — added one more reason for the 4K enrollment, which was learning about self-discipline by following the rules. She believed this would support her daughter's adjustment to kindergarten:

I guess 4K was a good buffer that's to help her to set rules. She carries her own backpack every day, then kind of packs up her own stuff, and then listens to the teacher and all those basic rules. But kindergarten is a longer duration, of course. [...] So more rules to
follow, and she sometimes has a hard time. She will adjust to the rules. And sometimes this just doesn't really help her so much. And perhaps the teacher has to keep on reminding her to do all those things.

The classroom rules that Caitlyn talked about included implicit ones that children needed to be able to read the room and discipline themselves. She ultimately expected her daughter to discipline herself without teachers’ reminders about rules and routines in kindergarten. For this reason, 4K was a good buffer for her daughter to get used to unspoken rules in the classroom.

She elaborated on her child’s needs:

She still needs a lot of reminding about what to do. But I guess at least the 4K is getting it started so she wouldn't be in shock when she goes to kindergarten and suddenly the teacher asks her students not to do that, be quiet, and all those things. Say, oh you raise your hand because you are asked questions, wait your turn, take time, and share things.

Rather than having constant reminders, she hoped that her child would eventually be able to navigate the day and discern appropriate behaviors at a certain time, place, and occasion. To summarize, Morgan, Benson, and Caitlyn whose income levels were above the FPT enrolled their children in 4K to be able to read and learn about implicit classroom expectations and rules.

On the other hand, FRL-eligible parents made their 4K decisions based on their values related to getting used to physical environments, people, and school attendance. Katalia — an FRL-eligible Latinx mother — enrolled her son in a summer 4K program after childcare 4K for school readiness development:

I wanted to be able to bridge the gap from how he has been structured at daycare and in 4K. I wanted to get him used to what it’s gonna be like to be at school in a school setting versus a daycare setting. So, then I enrolled him in the 4K summer program at her kindergarten school and so that helped a lot because then he got to make friends and stuff over the summer and some of which are still now for him at kindergarten, so I think that was probably the best decision that I made as far as that goes.

Katalia wanted her son to get used to his kindergarten school building and the people through the summer 4K. Later in the interview, she shared that she would make the same decision due to the
benefit of summer 4K housed in elementary school: “Not knowing the school building. Not knowing some of the teachers or some of his classmates or people who aren’t even his classmates now, but that he knows from that program, they’re like his friends now still. So, I would not have changed that.” Her reason for summer 4K enrollment was similar to elementary 4K parents’ reasons for enrollment.

Similarly, Tiffany — an FRL-eligible White mother — also wanted her child to develop friendships in 4K, which would last until kindergarten. However, she achieved this goal by enrolling her child in childcare 4K which was near the kindergarten school. She shared the reason in the survey: “The other reason for our choice was that many families who attend Felicidad Escuela plan to (or hope to) attend Cervantes Escuela. I think it's helpful to have a few familiar friends from 4K when you start a new school for kindergarten.” Tiffany already knew that many children attending her child’s 4K would also plan to attend kindergarten nearby. She hoped that would support her child’s school readiness by having continued friendships.

Slightly different, Clara — an FRL-eligible Multiracial mother — enrolled her child in childcare 4K to develop her child’s habit of school attendance. She explained this when describing her child’s 4K experience: “4K was good. It prepared her for kindergarten. I think that's why she did so well in kindergarten, because by her going to early childhood, 4K, and then kindergarten, I think that made her get in the habit of school and learn more.” She believed that attending the childcare center until 4K would help her daughter not to feel strange about getting away from home during the day to learn at school.

Altogether, parents enrolled their children in 4K for school readiness development. Parents whose income levels were above the FPT expected their children to learn classroom schedules, routines, rules, and expectations. These types of school readiness included rather
implicit learning. Then, FRL-eligible parents sent their children to 4K, hoping that their children would get used to a school building, people, and school attendance. This type of school readiness was not as implicit as learning about classroom expectations.

Parents’ decisions about where to send their children for 4K

1. Learning structure: Parents’ ideas about the structure of the learning environment influenced their decisions.

Five parents talked about how their beliefs/values related to the type of learning structure influenced their decisions about where to send their children. They valued a loosely structured environment that was phrased by play (unstructured) and learning/curriculum (structured). These parents were more likely to be Asian and Multiracial parents whose income levels were above the FPT, except for one FRL-eligible White parent. They also happened to be the parents who valued social-emotional readiness.

To begin with, Caitlyn — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT— enrolled her daughter in childcare 4K which she believed would provide playful experiences (unstructured) rather than academic learning (structured). She described why she chose a childcare center over elementary 4K when asked to describe things that she kept in mind as she decided:

The default is also elementary since we stay over the school district. And there we have that daycare right next door. [...] I think both are reasonable choices. Nothing is really a red flag for any of those; [...] I did ask around the difference between elementary school versus daycare. The feedback generally I got was it sounds like the average school is more like a school, and then the daycare is more playing around and more playing. It's more like a daycare per se. For us, we are not really interested in getting her into a study mode really early on. As parents we want her to enjoy herself through play as much as possible. That also lets us favor a daycare setting rather than a school setting. So, between the two we just picked the one that felt good to us.
She considered people’s feedback about the difference between the two different 4K programs. Assuming that their feedback was reliable, she chose childcare 4K which aligned with her preferences for play-based learning.

Then, other parents (i.e., Mateo, Eliana, Frida, and Benson) enrolled their children in childcare 4K because they wanted some level of structure with play. Mateo — a Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT— valued an environment that provided play-based learning with structured learning stations and schedules. He explained what made him feel right to send his daughter to childcare 4K after his visit:

It’s a play-based model, which we like. And I think I’m right in saying this, there are no plastics. It’s largely the play environments and within each room is laid out, there’s a different workstation, and forgive me, I’m not an expert in these things, but we really liked the way the rooms were laid out and the freedom for the children to run from one activity to the next and be relatively free. Of course, there are times and there are always offerings throughout this schedule period, and we really liked that and that it replicated in some ways a home. So, for example, when my 4K child was there she liked art and there were always art offerings. At least a couple of different things that she could do with art and then there were sensory tables and a table that can be converted from a sandbox to a water box.

Although he valued a playful environment and freedom in 4K, he also liked that the classroom environment was laid out and guided children’s learning through the structured schedule. This indicates that he enrolled his daughter in childcare 4K due to his preference for a semi-structured environment. He also felt that his daughter was able to pursue her learning interests and styles due to its semi-structured nature.

If Mateo preferred a laid-out classroom and schedule, other parents sought out 4K which provided semi-structured learning and curriculum. For example, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT— looked for some level of structure but not to extend to the fully structured curriculum. When Eliana was asked how she chose the childcare 4K, she shared, “Somewhere that they were stimulated enough. I didn’t necessarily need a curriculum,
but somewhere there was some structure.” What she looked for was not too little structured but not too much-structured environment. Additionally, another parent, Frida (a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT) also looked for a semi-structure that did not have rigid academic learning but had some play: “Obviously, the quality like how many teachers and what sorts of things do they do during the day? I liked that they're not so rigid in terms of academics, like that they both allowed for more just like playing and activities and that sort of thing.”

Having a little bit of both play and learning was a nice middle-ground for Frida’s child’s learning. Similarly, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — continued his current childcare center because it aligned with the perfect 4K setting he wanted to provide for his child. He described what he considered as the perfect 4K setting: “I think there would be a heavy emphasis on active learning. A good break for recess in the middle so he could run around. Then some kind of reading experience and math experience.” His description demonstrates that an ideal 4K environment for his child had both play and learning.

To summarize, these five parents looked for a loose or semi-structured environment when making their decisions about where to send their children. A loose or semi-structured environment was phrased as a combination of play as well as structured learning, curriculum, schedules, and classroom layout. These types of preferences were found mostly in Multiracial and Asian parents whose income levels were above the FPT. There was no substantial difference across parents’ gender.

2. **Continuity and familiarity: Parents decided to stay at their current childcare centers for 4K due to their familiarity and convenience.**

Except for parents who used home daycare centers before the 4K year, the rest of the parents enrolled their children in 4K at their current childcare centers. Continuing the use of the
same location was favored by parents across race, class, and gender of parents as well as children’s language and special needs. Their reasons for using the same location for 4K were rather simple. That is, 4K was there at the same childcare center, which made their family’s life easier. This can be found in the following interview quotes:

They also offered a private 4K program through that daycare. We decided to do 4K there because it was just easier for us in terms of, we were going to have a younger child also there at daycare. –Morgan (White, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

He was at [the childcare center just a little bit after four] and then started the 4K program there at [the same childcare center]. –Katalia (Latinx, FRL-eligible, LEP-Missing, Without Sped needs)

She went to early childhood, and then the school year of 4K. She had gone to early childhood first, and then it switched over to 4K. –Clara (Multiracial, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

She stayed at the same daycare [for 4K]. –Caitlyn (Asian, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

Because 4K was provided at their childcare centers, they did not have to move to a different location unless they had a particular reason to leave.

The detailed reasons that they continued using the same location were the following: their satisfaction with quality, their familiarity with the center, their burden of new childcare searching, their children’s continued friendships, parents’ childcare needs, and the unavailability of 4K at their children’s kindergarten schools. These reasons reflected how parents’ beliefs/values, their resources, and the 4K supply could come into their decisions altogether. For example, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT—decided to stay at their current childcare facility for 4K due to her satisfaction with the teachers’ instructional quality. She explained how her positive experience with the center led her to enroll her son in 4K at the same location:
It was pretty good. They had actually pretty new teachers, like new, fresh out of college. But they were very good with the kids. They had a curriculum set up and were very good at making sure individual needs were met. I really liked that. And the 4K was already at the daycare, which is the reason why we stayed there. [...] They transitioned into a 4K classroom even before 4K officially started. For those reasons, we kept them in the same place.

Since Eliana had a chance to observe teachers’ instructional quality before the 4K year, it was easy for her to make a decision. Moreover, the transition to 4K was seamless in that her son simply could move to a 4K classroom in the same building. She believed that her child’s familiarity with the center played an important role in the easy transition to 4K. She explained the meaning of familiarity to her when asked to describe things she considered for her decisions:

**Eliana:** 4K decisions? To decide to go to that specific? Well, whether it would be a good fit for him. I guess the biggest thing was fit. And for [my child], specifically, fit means not new.

**Interviewer:** Not new?

**Eliana:** Not necessarily new unless he has to be. So, familiarity for him is a big thing. And being very familiar with the place he already is and having the transition happen even the summer before into 4K, for us, made the decision really easy.

Her son did not have to take time to adjust to 4K because he already knew the place.

Furthermore, Mateo — a Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT— explained that staying at the same place was the way to give his child consistency. He explained why his childcare center won over another school that he gave thought to: “We chose that in some part because of the consistency for 4K that is as opposed to say Theo School, which has a 4K as well.” In addition, Mateo thought continuity of the use of the same site would alleviate his family’s burden of another childcare search for 4K after the search they already did for their current childcare setting. This reflected their struggles in finding available spots at a childcare center:

**Interviewer:** When you were looking at [your current childcare center], the fact that they offer 4K, was that on your radar when you were choosing it for two-year-old programs or…?
Mateo: It was.
Interviewer: ...was that more of an added bonus?
Mateo: It was. Absolutely it was. [...] We were maybe in a bit of that mindset where, “Okay, we have to secure a place, we have to know what this future is because we’re not just going to make it up as we go along,” but we’ve discovered that you can very much make it up as you go along. Like if we don’t want our son to go to 4K, we’re not going to be locked out of some other place just because we decide later. But the truth is, so again, we like the teachers, the continuity, and the class. What really has been nice for our daughter is that she went through 2K through 4K, it’s more or less the same people, largely. At least half the class by the time she was in 4K was the same kids she had been into. [...] In kindergarten, she had four kids that were in her 4K if not her three and two-year-old classes as well. [...] And then likewise, she’s involved in athletics, and she does different things in the community, so she’s always running into these [same] kids. [...] It’s community building and that was important.

Many factors played into Mateo’s family’s 4K decision-making process. Due to the burden of a new childcare search, knowing that his childcare center provided 4K when he initially started using the center was a plus. Attending the same childcare center provided not only familiarity but also continued friendships in the neighborhood area and kindergarten. What was better was the instructional quality based on his experience with the center before 4K.

Lastly, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — continued using the same childcare center because of his family’s limited time-related resources and the unavailability of 4K at the kindergarten school:

Clear Lake Elementary school was not an option. They don't do 4K there. So, we never really considered sending him to Stevens Elementary school which I think is where we would have been sent to, where he was initially put into. We never really considered it because we had talked to parents previously about the transit difficulties. Justin, my oldest kid, had a friend in 4K who was doing it at Stevens and then coming to our childcare center for the second half of the day. His mom had to leave work to sort of make sure he could get from one place to the next. That wasn't going to work for us.

Staying at the same center was an optimal way for Benson’s family due to his time-related resources and 4K supply issues. For this reason, he would like to make the same decision if he could have a do-over even though he claimed himself as an advocate for public schools:
I think we would make the same choice. I sort of feel a little guilty saying that because I consider myself an advocate for public schools, and we sent him to the private 4K. It's sort of where he was, and it just sort of seemed easier. But I would do the same thing over again. It's just more convenient for our schedule. There were fewer transitions. It was less time on the road and all those things. [...] We liked the comfort level. We liked the fact that it just segued nicely to the afternoon session if it's not 4K. So, I think given our situation, given what we would try to do, I think our childcare center was the right spot and we would do it again.

“Given [his family’s] situation,” childcare 4K was much easier to access for his family. Plus, he liked continuity that allowed his child to have a smooth transition to 4K with some comfort.

To put it all together, parents, who used a childcare center before their 4K years, thought continuity would benefit their families in many ways regardless of their race, class, gender, and children’s language and special needs. Due to the continuity, their decision-making process was often described as easy.

3. Language programs or special education services: Families of children with language needs and special needs considered their children’s needs for their 4K decisions.

1) Children’s home language learning could be a decision-making factor.

Since childcare 4K programs do not have bilingual programs, many parents did not enroll their children in childcare 4K for their home language learning. However, I would like to introduce a couple of parents who shared that they either looked for a bilingual teacher at childcare 4K as a workaround or decided to strengthen their home language at home instead when making their 4K decisions. The former parent’s decision was related to where to send their child for 4K, while the latter was not. I will explain the reasons, which can provide us with implications for language programs in the district.

Tiffany — an FRL-eligible White mother — has a child whose home language is Spanish. She moved her child from home-based care to childcare 4K because of a bilingual teacher at the childcare center. She explained her decision-making process in the survey: “An
important part of our choice was a 4K that would incorporate an introduction to Spanish so that it would be more familiar when starting [Dual Language Immersion (DLI)] kindergarten. Mills childcare center is the only school that I'm aware of that has a bilingual teacher.” Because she planned to send her child to the DLI kindergarten, she thought that enrolling her child in the childcare center where the teacher spoke Spanish would ease her child’s transition to kindergarten. Then, why did she not enroll her child in elementary bilingual 4K? She elaborated more on this in the interview when asked why she chose childcare 4K over other 4K options:

As far as why we initially made that choice, [...] since [older children] went to Cervantes Escuela [(DLI kindergarten)], we wanted a school that was ideally where he would have some friends who would be going there too. And there is no direct feeder program into [Cervantes Escuela]. They don’t have their own classroom there, so it could have been anywhere. And we knew that some families did choose Mills childcare and that was for some of the ones who already had siblings there so they knew they were going to get in and others who were applying who hoped they would but didn’t know.

It would have been ideal to enroll her child in 4K at Cervantes Escuela Elementary school where her older siblings were also attending. However, 4K was not provided at Cervantes Escuela. For this reason, she deliberately chose Mills childcare center because some families had similar kindergarten plans as hers. Further, it was helpful for her to know that some families at the center were certain about their 4K children’s acceptance to the DLI kindergarten due to their older children’s DLI attendance. This led her to believe that attending the Mills would provide her child with continued friendships beyond the 4K year: “Having a group of people where hopefully at least some of his friendships would carry over into kindergarten was important. I think they have a much better chance to establish playing with kids more in 4K than they do in kindergarten.” Given her situation, Mills childcare center was the suboptimal option for her child.
On the other hand, a parent whose child’s home language is Chinese had a different experience than Tiffany. For example, Caitlyn — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — cared about her child’s home language learning, Chinese. However, she did not consider this when making her 4K decision. She explained the reason when asked if her child’s language learning was considered when enrolling her child in 4K:

I do. Yeah, I do think about language. But then most of the language they offer, it's like they are - bilingual means English and Spanish. But I don't think they are trying it - a mixture [of other languages]. [...] Right now, she still understands Chinese. We try to speak Chinese at home as much as possible. Because we're around - when we have people at our Chinese friends' place.

For Caitlyn, whether to enroll her child in elementary or childcare 4K did not matter because there was no Chinese bilingual program in the district anyway. Instead, she looked for 4K locations that met her child’s other needs than language (e.g., curriculum and location) as she shared later in the interview. This family’s story teaches us a couple of things. One, some childcare 4K parents cared about their children’s home language learning. Two, the district’s bilingual program that tried to include Spanish bilingual families could exclude families who speak other languages than Spanish because bilingual in the district meant dual language in Spanish and English.

2) Children’s special needs were considered for parents’ decisions.

Parents of children with special needs continued special education services at the same center if they stayed at the same childcare center for 4K. Because their childcare centers already had been arranging the services for their families, parents perceived that they could continue using the services easily. For example, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — continued using the same childcare center for 4K. She shared it was easy to use special education services that were already arranged by the childcare center for her son who had
an Individualized Education Program (IEP): “Easton had an IEP, individualized education program, because he had a stutter, a disfluency. So that's another thing about our daycare. They were very good about getting a speech pathologist/speech therapist over to work with him during 4K.” Availability of the services was important for her to make a 4K decision and for her son to achieve his IEP goals. Eliana elaborated on how the arrangement worked:

**Interviewer:** So, Easton was staying at the [same] daycare, but he got some service from the district. [...] **Eliana:** The daycare made it very feasible for us. And I knew there was another student there who also had somebody from the school district come too, so they made it very easy for that to happen.

Her child was able to receive services without leaving the childcare center. Based on her observation, another student with special needs also received the service without difficulty because the childcare center made that arrangement feasible for families.

Slightly different, Clara — a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT — did not have to think about her child’s needs when deciding to stay at her current childcare center because her child was diagnosed during the 4K year. However, her child’s 4K teachers suggested to Clara a special education diagnosis for her child based on their experiences with her child. She shared how 4K helped her to find out about her child’s special needs:

I just thought she was just a hyper child, and then when it came to 4K, they just said that she wasn't paying attention to what she should be focusing on and doing. Then I went and had her tested. And that's when they said that she had Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and they referred me to Doctor Linsey, which is her therapist, and he is the one that prescribes her medicine.

With the 4K support, Clara was able to learn about her child’s needs and start a special education diagnosis process sooner than later. This then allowed her child to receive individual support services in 4K:

They help her with extra reading and all of that. There's the teacher that used to sit outside of her classroom with three other students, and they'd read these books. There
were just, I think, three or four other people that were doing individual stuff with her. Clara’s 4K decision was not influenced by her child’s special needs. However, once her child was diagnosed with ADHD, getting the service at the childcare center was done without any struggles. Then, she did not have to move her child to another 4K site for the service in the middle of the school year.

Altogether, families of children with language or special needs had various decision-making processes and 4K experiences. Although language was not the main factor that childcare 4K parents considered in their decisions, one parent looked for a childcare center that would meet her child’s Spanish language learning needs (e.g., a bilingual teacher). On the other hand, the other parent did not take her child’s Chinese language learning into consideration for her 4K decision due to the unavailability of Chinese bilingual programs across all district 4K programs. Instead, she considered other factors than language learning for her 4K decision. In addition, parents of children with special needs did not experience struggles when making decisions about where to send their children for 4K because the availability of services was guaranteed.

Table C12 summarizes how parents considered their children’s language and special needs when making their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table C12]

**Parent’s allocation of their resources to make 4K work**

1. **Informational resources: Parents’ access to 4K information influenced their decisions about where to send their children.**

   Parents used locational and social resources when making their 4K decisions. The locational resources that informed parents’ decisions included 4K locations near their homes. The social resources they used entailed childcare directors, their older children’s previous
experiences at the same childcare center, their social networks, websites, tours, and community programs. Although all parents used social resources regardless of their demographics, some types of information they used for their decisions differed by class. In addition, parents’ use of locational resources differed by class.

To begin with, Multiracial and Asian parents whose income levels were above the FPT used their neighborhood as information to select their 4K location. Many of them looked for the availability of childcare centers in their neighborhood so that it was close to their home:

[I chose] daycare because it was close to home. Somewhere we didn’t have to travel too far. – Eliana (Asian mother, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

The default is elementary since we stay over the school district. We have daycare right next door. It was kind of more opportune of those two locations. – Caitlyn (Asian mother, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

At first, I had just signed her up for the neighborhood school near our place because 4K is through the school district, so she has to go to the normal school. Then I found out from somebody that there are also these community centers that offer 4K [that is also close to our home]. – Frida (Multiracial mother, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)

My brother and sister both went to Wales when I was a child and being affiliated with the university seemed a sensible choice. Not the most convenient for us, not that I should complain because everything in Madison is relatively seven or eight minutes away. That’s longer than four minutes away (comparing the location of another childcare center with our current childcare center). – Mateo (Multiracial father, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

These parents perceived the locations of available elementary and childcare 4K as pieces of their information to use when weighing different 4K locations. The number of 4K locations they considered in their neighborhoods generally ranged from one to three or to five at most.

However, Tiffany — an FRL-eligible White mother — did not consider childcare 4K locations in her neighborhood because she planned to send her child to a school outside of the neighborhood eventually:
I guess I don't really know much about the other programs in the city because I haven't experienced any of the other ones. If they are similar to Mills childcare center, it's being done really well. I mean I didn't feel like I had a good choice that's close to me, but that's part of the logistics, that my kids go to the charter school [after the DLI kindergarten experience]. So, I didn't really want to send them to the closest neighborhood one because that's not where they're going to be going eventually, they won't have the same group of friends, so it isn't a good fit for us.

In the case of Tiffany, neighborhood 4K options did not serve as information because she already knew where her 4K child would attend eventually in later grades with her other older children. The reason that she chose Mills childcare center was because of her child’s language learning and also her plan for enrolling her child in the DLI program during the kindergarten year rather than the proximity to her house.

Switching gears to social resources, all parents used some types of information they gained through social networks or activities regardless of their demographic factors. One of the common resources parents referenced was information they gained at their current childcare center as *current families* if they had been using it before 4K or their older children used the same site before. For example, Morgan — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — gained 4K information by attending a 4K orientation session at her current childcare center:

> We needed to find a place that would do the full day. We went to the daycare there partially because they had a little orientation. So, I went there; they said this is what our 4K program looks like, this is what it would look like if you went to a public program and then attended wraparound care, what the day would look like, and how our child would be transferred to or from whatever school they were going to go and like cost-wise for wraparound care versus paying for just the 4K program.

Rather than seeking out 4K information by herself, her childcare center provided all the information related to 4K as a packet. Besides, Clara — an FRL-eligible, Multiracial mother — also learned from her childcare teacher that 4K was also provided at the same childcare center. She explained how she learned about childcare 4K:
Because that's where early childhood is too. And they had asked me if Jaymi was going to go to 4K there. At first, I didn't know you guys had 4K here, but they said they didn't. So, they said that she could just do 4K instead of going to elementary 4K. So that's what my younger child is going to do.

This demonstrates that attending the childcare center was one of the ways for the parents to naturally learn about a community 4K option. This was also found from other parents. For example, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — learned about 4K from a childcare director of her current childcare center: “[I got 4K information from] the daycare, so specifically the director because [my child] has been there for several years.” This was why Mateo — a Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT — said, “[4K] was given. We were going to stay with [our current childcare center]. There’s nothing the childcare has done,” when he was asked if there was paperwork that he needed to enroll his child in 4K. Like Mateo, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — felt that 4K was given: “4K was already at the daycare, which is the reason why we stayed there.” These parents’ information sources tell us that many childcare 4K parents easily gained information about 4K from their current childcare centers.

However, because of continuing the same childcare center, some parents did not know what 4K was. For example, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — was not quite sure which part of the day was the district 4K and childcare center portion:

We didn’t have a whole sense of what was going on in 4K which actually was good prep for kindergarten. [...] We knew they were doing stuff, working in small groups, and doing activities. [...] But I didn’t get a sense during my youngest child’s time there sort of what was distinct about it. How it was set apart from the other part of their curriculum in Wales. [...] It was never entirely clear to me where 4K ended and where the Wales curriculum began. The only real difference is we were getting this check from the school.

This indicates that he easily gained information about the 4K offer and the curriculum of the center because his child had been using the same childcare center before 4K. However, it was
never clear to him what 4K was besides his family receiving the tuition assistance check for the 4K time.

In addition to information parents gained from their current childcare centers, parents’ older children’s previous experiences with their current childcare center became one of their informational sources for their decisions. This type of information also let them know how 4K enrollment worked. As I previously introduced Tiffany’s (an FRL-eligible White mother) decision-making, she chose Mills childcare center which had a Spanish bilingual teacher. How she knew this information was because her older children attended the same center; this led her to let her 4K child follow the same footstep as her older children before attending the DLI program at kindergarten: “Mills childcare center was the same place my current third grade went, so she chose the same one.” Her older child’s experience with the center led her not to consider other options but Mills childcare center. Moreover, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — referenced his older child’s experience at childcare 4K for two reasons. One was about a 4K enrollment process: “We had sort of been through it already with [my oldest]. We sort of knew the basic drill.” The second one was specifically about the childcare 4K site:

We had considered [the elementary 4K] for my oldest previously. But we would have lost our place in Wales by going there in the afternoons. So, it just wasn’t going to work that way. We had a good experience previously. So, my youngest often gets the same experiences my oldest had until he told us that it’s not a fit.

Through his previous experience with his oldest, he already knew about a 4K enrollment process, the caveat of using both elementary 4K and wrap-around care, and his childcare center operation. As Tiffany and Benson shared, their older children’s previous experiences with the same site were important information for them to make decisions. Some other parents shared that they planned to use their 4K child’s experience as information when making 4K decisions for their
youngest child (i.e., Frida, a Multiracial mother, and Mateo, a Multiracial father, whose income levels were above the FPT).

Furthermore, many parents consulted with people around them (e.g., friends, family members, and colleagues at work); some of them also had visits/tours before making decisions. For example, as Mateo (a Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT) shared before, he initially considered the options that his family members attended. Also, Morgan — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT — mostly consulted with people in her social circles:

Just talking to other families that I knew and calling around. [...] It was narrowed down to two locations and talking to a few other people that we had realized went to the place that we were interested in. They liked it and a lot of healthcare workers went there. That was kind of the reason we ended up there.

Reaching out to her social circle was helpful to gain information about the center she was interested in and choose the site between the two options. Similarly, Caitlyn — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — who recently moved to the U.S. consulted with her co-workers in addition to the district website:

I enjoy my work environment. We just naturally talked about things like choosing schools since it was the enrollment period. This was the first time I was doing a 4K enrollment in this country. So, a lot of things that I didn’t know about like what to bring and when to start the process, what’s the difference between elementary school and daycare, and why the price is different. I asked them and of course, they asked me, “Oh, where are you sending your kids to?” Then, I said, “I am thinking of this.” You basically talk about what they think about the daycare. It’s more like this way rather than me going out and asking where a good place will be.

Advice from her co-workers played an important role in her understanding of the 4K enrollment process, the difference between elementary and childcare 4K, and specific 4K site information. However, it did not mean that she did not research on her own. She also found a list of daycare centers from the district website: “I think it’s the Madison district website. They manage a
daycare list [other than elementary 4K and kindergarten]. We got it from there. Just search each
daycare, basically.”

Accompanied by the information they gained from their social circles, some parents
visited the childcare center to make sure that they made the right decision. After Frida — a
Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT— learned from her social circle
about community-based 4K sites, she and her husband visited two childcare 4K sites to compare:

I found out about Gilbert and Wales centers. I actually went and visited Gilbert which
was closer to our house. Then my husband and I both went to visit Wales. Wales was
more expensive. I said to my husband the main difference because they both seem high
quality. Wales, she’s going to be with children where the diversity of children is mostly
represented through [their special needs]. Gilbert center, she’s going to be with children
who have a higher variety of races and ethnicities and a higher diversity of different
income levels because Gilbert takes a large percentage of families in poverty. My
husband grew up in poverty. He said he actually doesn’t want her so much in that
environment, which I don’t necessarily agree with, but I respected his background. [...] I
really don't care. I thought she would do well in either. Since he had a preference, let’s
put her in Wales center.

Visits to the two childcare centers provided Frida and her husband with information about the
center such as price and diversity. This allowed them to find what they preferred the most and
narrow down their options to one. The information gained from the visits could yield an
opportunity for parents to talk to teachers before the 4K year. As an example, Mateo — a
Multiracial father whose income level was above the FPT— had tours of the center, which
naturally led him to meet and talk with teachers at the center before enrolling his child.

Finally, the information that FRL-eligible families (Katalia, Tamar, Clara, and Benson)
used was uniquely different from others in that they relied on quality ratings, information from
community programs, and tuition assistantship programs. For example, Tamar — an FRL-
eligible Black mother — and Katalia — an FRL-eligible Latinx mother— checked the quality
ratings of their childcare centers before enrollment. Katalia’s story will tell us the details:
Most of the places in Madison are pretty stellar, so I didn’t have to worry about if an adult was going to be teaching my child. [...] Of course, I want them to be at a place that has at least three stars because they do this thing out of five stars. If they are at least a three-star, I think that is sufficient. I don’t think they rate schools but daycares. My child’s childcare center has a five-star, and her previous childcare center has a five-star right now. A few years ago, they were three stars.

For Katalia, the stars of the childcare center were indicators of quality. For this reason, she looked for childcare centers that had at least three stars out of five. In addition, Benson — an FRL-eligible White father — got a recommendation about his current childcare center from the medical school that had a partnership with it. There, he learned about what to look for to be able to take advantage of the Child Care Tuition Assistance Program (CCTAP) which provided financial assistance to income-eligible student parents for their childcare expenses. He said, “the childcare center was licensed so that we could get some of the money back from CCTAP.”

Slightly different from these three FRL-eligible parents, Clara — an FRL-eligible, Multiracial mother — shared that she considered Head Start 4K and her child’s childcare center because her child was part of the community program that was connected to Head Start:

**Interviewer:** Why did you think of the Head Start program as an option?
**Clara:** Because I worked at Centers for Families. Actually, Jaymi was in a program from ages one to three with Zoey at Centers for Families.

Although she did not share how Centers for Families was connected to Head Start programs, she implied that it was the place that provided the 0-3 programs and was connected to Head Start.

Altogether, parents used their location and social resources to access childcare 4K. Multiracial and Asian parents whose income levels were above the FPT considered their neighborhood childcare centers to inform their decisions; however, one FRL-eligible White

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55Centers for Families aims to build strong and stable families. They also provide childcare referrals for families.
mother did not perceive neighborhood childcare centers as information because of her child’s school plan in later grades. In addition, regardless of parents’ demographics, they all used social resources for their decisions. However, FRL-eligible families were more likely to use information about quality ratings, a tuition assistance program, and local childcare options provided by the community program.

2. **Time and financial resources: Parents mobilized their time and financial resources to make 4K work.**

Many parents across race, class, and gender had inflexible work schedules, so they looked for full-time childcare centers that could complement their limited time-related resources. Compared to elementary 4K parents, working parents were able to easily meet their wrap-around care needs through childcare 4K. For example, Eliana — an Asian mother whose income level was above the FPT — explained why it had to be childcare 4K:

> Wrap-around care was really important. It would be a no-brainer for me if I was a stay home mom. Well, he’s going to go to kindergarten. So why not try the 4K at the kindergarten school? Because he would have to make a new transition anyway. So why not go there? But just because I couldn’t. I didn’t have that luxury at that point. We stayed [in the same childcare center].

For employed parents like Eliana, sending their children to elementary 4K looked like a luxurious option because half-day 4K would work best for stay-home mothers. In reality, since many families these days have double-income sources, wrap-around care arrangements are necessary. Similarly, Frida — a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT — also wanted childcare 4K as a must due to transportation issues:

> The elementary school by our house did not offer after-school care, so it was getting difficult to think about how this was going to work if she was there in the morning. We were on the far east side and we both worked downtown. Like how will we possibly pick her up and get her somewhere else? So, I decided to start looking more seriously into the community center options.
Although her family also investigated elementary 4K options, enrollment in childcare 4K was the best option because her family did not need to go through the hustle and bustle of transporting their child in the middle of the day. To sum up, both employed parents (Eliana and Frida) considered elementary 4K but the half-day and unavailability of transportation to wrap-around care were a deal-breaker.

However, parents’ wrap-around care needs were not necessarily met even if they enrolled their children in full-day childcare 4K. For Katalia — an FRL-eligible Latinx mother, the center’s open and close-time and its location should have been compatible with her work schedule and travel time because she used public transportation. When asked how she managed her work schedule and childcare 4K, she explained the complexity of coordinating the time and location:

The Keene center is a daycare in the morning and 4K in the afternoon. I’ve never had to worry about my schedule. They’re open from 6 to 6. So, when I’m looking for a location, I’m always looking at what time they open and close because if they don’t open until 8 and they close at 5, that doesn’t work even if they’re in the perfect location. It’s the location and time that they open. [...] I would just schedule myself at a time where I could drop them off by 6. I would get up at 5 in the morning, get ready at 4:45 and get them to where they needed to be and me to be where I needed to be.

Because she did not drive, a much longer travel time via public transportation was considered. Later in the interview, she also shared that the childcare center should be on the bus line so that she could easily access it. Plus, the open-and closing time was important for her to drop off her children before going to work and pick them up after work. When everything matched, it was then the best option for her.

Contrary to employed parents, stay-home parents did not need to think about wrap-around care needs. Clara — an FRL-eligible Multiracial, stay-home mother — continued using the same childcare center not because she needed wrap-around care but because she valued
continuity of childcare at the same place. In addition, Caitlyn — an Asian, employed mother whose income level was above the FPT— did not need wrap-around care due to her stay-home husband. However, she sent her child to childcare 4K once a week to give a break to her stay-home husband who moved to the U.S. with her to support her career by giving up his job in their home country: “I think it’s more for my husband’s benefit than for my child. It’s more like one day of the week so he can have a little longer stretch, so time that he can arrange on his own.”

As far as parents’ financial resources, many parents whose income levels were above the FPT considered the affordability of childcare centers, while many FRL-eligible families did not talk about it when explaining their decision-making processes. Affordability was added as another layer to employed parents’ wrap-around care needs. For example, Morgan — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— needed wrap-around care because both child’s parents worked. She shared her cost-benefit analysis with elementary and childcare 4K options: “Weighing all of [factors], it made more sense to pay for the private 4K. It was actually less expensive than paying for wrap-around care and doing a public program. Plus, it would put more stress on the child.” Doing 4K at the childcare center was a less expensive option for her family, which saved her family’s concerns about arranging wrap-around care and covering overall costs that entailed childcare and transportation.

Moreover, other parents whose income levels were above the FPT considered affordability when comparing different childcare 4K locations. For example, Mateo (a Multiracial father) and his wife could not ignore the high cost of childcare centers: “We might’ve chosen Watson. It has a lot of good things going for it. But it’s a little expensive.” Their weight on affordability made sense when he shared why he moved to Madison from San Francisco: “Part of the decision to move back here was also economics. It’s much more affordable here than
it is in San Francisco, which affords us the opportunity to be with our kids all of the time pretty much until they’re both in school full time.” Because Mateo and his wife worked from home, they were able to attend an affordable, half-day childcare 4K. However, they had to coordinate their work schedules to take care of their child after the half-day 4K. Mateo explained how they made this work by coordinating work schedules: “We typically trade off our hours. So, each of us has about two and a half-dedicated workdays a week. That said, we’re often up at 11:30 at night doing our work after the kids go to bed.” Mateo’s family’s decision-making process shows us how their trade-offs were made between time and money. Half-day childcare 4K option was affordable; however, they had to change their work schedules to take care of their child at home for the rest of the day.

On the contrary, many FRL-eligible parents did not talk about affordability as a decision-making factor in the interview. However, their stories showed that they selected affordable options in action. For example, Tiffany — an FRL-eligible White mother — had a part-time job and sent her child to free, half-day childcare 4K. It was a good thing that there was a free, half-day childcare 4K option because she did care about affordability for previous childcare arrangements during her child’s 0-3 years: “Financially, we didn’t decide on preschool because it wasn’t needed, and it was outside of our finances at that time.” In addition, like Benson (a White father) I introduced before, he did talk about affordability as the prioritized decision-making factor. However, his family tried to find a place where it both provided wrap-around care and tuition assistance.

To sum up, many parents across their race, class, and gender enrolled their children in childcare 4K to complement their lack of time-related resources due to their work commitments during the day. For this reason, working mothers' and fathers’ wrap-around care needs were
better served at full-day, childcare 4K than at the elementary location. However, childcare 4K was not purely their choice. In fact, they had no other options than childcare 4K to make 4K work even though they gave thought to elementary 4K as well. On the other hand, stay-home parents did not have to think about their wrap-around care needs; instead, their decisions were made based on their other preferences. In addition, affordability was discussed among many families whose income levels were above the FPT, while it was not among FRL-eligible families. Yet, affordability was already considered for FRL-eligible families’ decisions because they enrolled their children in childcare 4K which was either free or partnered with tuition assistance.

Table C13 summarizes how parents mobilized their information, time-related and financial resources to access childcare 4K:

[Insert Table C13]

**Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter**

Childcare 4K parents’ decisions were mostly based on family context-dependent quality such as practical features (e.g., 4K hours, childcare costs, 4K locations, and transportation), beliefs/values (e.g., continuity, loose type of learning environment, and language acquisition), and availability of special education services. These influenced their decisions about where to send their children for 4K and their accessibility. Yet, they did consider structural (e.g., accreditation and ratios) and process quality (e.g., teachers’ instructions and interactions with children) as well. As opposed to elementary 4K parents, there were more venues (e.g., quality rating system and observations as current childcare customers) for childcare 4K parents to observe these two conventional quality factors (i.e., structural and process quality) and use them as information for their decisions about where to send their children.
I found that many parents already had been using the same childcare center before the 4K year for their wrap-around care needs. This then led them to continue using the same site for 4K to decrease the number of transitions for both their children and parents themselves. For this reason, these parents easily gained 4K information from their current childcare centers. As a result, their decision was described as easy because the information was given to them. However, continuing the same childcare center did not necessarily mean that parents were informed about what part of the day was 4K.

Further, there were distinctive differences by parents’ class when looking at the types of information parents used and the affordability of a childcare center. This can be one of the reasons why many childcare 4K parents considered zero to two 4K locations (Table C10). Although all parents, regardless of race, class, gender, and children’s needs, commonly used their social resources to gain information about 4K sites, FRL-eligible parents were more likely to refer to quality rating systems and tuition assistance information. In addition, locational resources (i.e., proximity to their homes or neighborhoods) were used mostly by parents whose income levels were above the FPT. Moreover, parents considered their affordability to use childcare 4K. Although FRL-eligible families did not talk about affordability during the interview, they enrolled their children in childcare 4K which was either free or partnered with tuition assistance. On the contrary, families whose income levels were above the FPT had to pay full tuition and frequently talked about affordability. This supports the finding from parents’ answers to closed-ended survey questions (Table C10) that childcare 4K parents showed more of a gap by class than elementary 4K parents in terms of moderate-high stress levels in their decision-making.
Childcare 4K parents considered their educational values/beliefs and availability of special education services to make decisions about whether and where to send their children. FRL-eligible parents were more likely to consider academic readiness as a 4K goal, while parents whose income levels were above the FPT mostly considered social-emotional or a combination of both readiness when making decisions about 4K enrollment. The parents whose income levels were above the FPT and who valued social-emotional learning were more likely to prefer childcare 4K which had a loosely structured learning environment. Also, only children’s Spanish home language was the influence for parents’ decisions about where to send their children. Lastly, the availability of special education services at childcare 4K informed parents’ decisions as well.

To access 4K, childcare 4K parents needed to find a coordination point among time, location, cost, and availability of the program. The meaning of accessibility to childcare 4K parents reflected the following things: a) either full-day 4K options on-site or at least transportation arrangements between 4K and wrap-around care, b) affordable childcare options, c) availability of 4K at their home elementary schools, and d) easy access to 4K information. This indicates that childcare 4K parents needed affordable childcare options at their convenient time at their preferred locations. If the full day 4K was not available, they would need at least transportation to use the two different locations. In addition, easy access to 4K information was uniquely a determining factor that influenced childcare 4K parents’ access. Overall, parents’ employment, gender, and budget intersected simultaneously in their accessibility.
Chapter 7: Head Start 4K

In this chapter, I explain how and why parents enrolled their children in Head Start 4K.

Definition of the Case and Context of Head Start 4K

The case I present in this chapter is parents who enrolled their children in Head Start 4K in Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). To help with a contextualized understanding of their decision-making processes, I begin by explaining Head Start 4K operation in MMSD. This helps clarify how parents’ 4K decisions were situated in their local 4K supply. This also helps us understand how families accommodate their life contextual factors to the Head Start 4K options in the district.

Head Start is a comprehensive, free program that supports child development and provides a wide range of services for children living at or below the federal poverty guidelines. The services provided by Head Start include but are not limited to health and nutrition services, mental health support, and family support services. Head Start poverty guidelines (Reach Dane, n.d.a) for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia in 2022 are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons in the family unit</th>
<th>Poverty guideline</th>
<th>Persons in the family unit</th>
<th>Poverty guideline</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$13,590</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$32,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$18,310</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$37,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$23,030</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$27,750</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$46,630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this reason, parents who enrolled their children in Head Start 4K in MMSD were Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)-eligible families.

There are four Head Start options for children ages 3-5 in the district: a half-day, full-day, extended-day, and home-based program. Half-day programs operate for 3.5 hours per day 4 days
a week during the school year. The half-day programs are provided in each morning and afternoon session. Transportation is also provided. Full-day programs operate from 6 am to 6 pm 5 days a week for 12 months. For families to be eligible for the full-day programs, they should receive a child subsidy or city funding and must work or participate in an employability or job-search program. Transportation may not be provided for a full-day program. Next, extended-day programs operate 7 hours per day 4 days per week during the school year. Transportation is provided pending the service area. Lastly, home-based programs are mostly for 3-year-old children; however, the programs are provided for 4-year-old children if there is a need. In this type of program, teachers visit families’ homes weekly for 90 minutes, provide parent/child activities, and support parents in their interactions with their children. For the center-based Head Start programs that participate in YoungStar, parents can check the program’s quality (e.g., provider details, quality ratings, waitlist, and regulation details) on the YoungStar website. Besides the Head Start programs for children ages 3-5, there are Early Head Start options in the district for children up to age 3: center-based, home-based, and childcare partnership programs. In the current study, some Head Start parents had enrolled their children in Early Head Start programs before the 4K year and continued using Head Start for 4K.

Teachers’ licensure requirements in Head Start 4K are the same as elementary and childcare 4K teachers (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, n.d.e). The district website also mentions that a child/teacher ratio of 4K in Early Care and Education centers, which includes Head Start 4K, cannot exceed more than 20 (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.c).

56 The center-based programs operate schedules from 6 am to 6 pm 5 days per week for 12 months of the year. The home-based programs provide weekly parent/child activities for children’s development and parents. These programs operate for 90 minutes on a weekly basis. Lastly, childcare partnership programs are Early Head Start programs that are partnered with local childcare centers. Families should receive a subsidy to be eligible for this type of program.

57 https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/early-learning/frequently-asked-questions-about-4k
**Families in Head Start 4K**

Before examining why and how parents enrolled their children in Head Start 4K, I present who the families are in the case of Head Start 4K. Table H1 below shows descriptive statistics of survey respondents and interview participants who selected Head Start 4K. Approximately 4% of the survey respondents (21 out of 556) and roughly 4% of the interview participants (2 out of 51) enrolled their children in Head Start 4K. Also, approximately 61% of interview participants (31 out of 51) happened to participate in both survey and interview; among those 31 parents, one parent sent their child to Head Start 4K.

[Insert Table H1]

As indicated in Table H1, Head Start 4K parents were more likely to be FRL-eligible and Black or Latinx with at least high school degrees. Compared to the children in other cases, children with limited English proficiency or special needs were more likely to attend Head Start 4K or school-based 4K. Also, most parents, in this case, were females, children’s mothers.

To understand families’ 4K decision-making experiences transversally, I explain families’ childcare experiences before the 4K year and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range. Table H2 below describes children’s kindergarten enrollment age ranges and parents’ answers to the closed-ended survey questions and interview questions about their children’s childcare experiences between 0-3 years old. Since parents were able to report multiple childcare arrangements in both interview and survey, an individual family’s childcare source indicated in Table H2 could be more than one.

[Insert Table H2]
As indicated in Table H2, most Head Start 4K parents had their children stay at home and/or used Early Head Start programs. Also, their children’s kindergarten entrance ages were between 5.09 and 5.86, which was similar to the range of school-based and childcare 4K children.

Quality Components that Parents Considered for Their 4K Decisions

Family context-dependent quality that reflects key constructs in the accommodations framework

While Head Start 4K parents in the survey indicated that they did not consider structural and process quality for their decisions, they considered family context-dependent quality such as 4K/kindergarten readiness and the availability of 4K near their place of residence or workplace.

1. Parents considered their children’s 4K and kindergarten readiness to decide whether to enroll their children in 4K.

1) 4K readiness: Parents looked at how ready children were for 4K.

Three parents considered how socially or academically ready their children were to handle the 4K structure or learning when deciding whether to send their children to 4K. These parents were FRL-eligible (100%), indicated as Black (67%) or Latinx (33%), and had obtained degrees ranging from high school to B.A/More degrees. Their children did not have limited English proficiency or special needs. For example, Jane and Selena considered their children’s social-emotional and academic 4K readiness when making their 4K decisions. Jane, whose child had gone to a childcare center before the 4K year, looked at how her daughter was ready to deal with friendship building in a new setting at Head Start 4K. She explained, “Our child makes friends easily, so we had no problems moving to a new facility where she did not know anyone” (Head Start 4K, Black, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above Limited Language Proficiency (LEP) level, Without Special Education (Sped) needs). On the other hand, Selena, whose child
had stayed home before the 4K year, looked at her daughter’s academic readiness when making the 4K decision. She explained, “She recognizes her name and tries to write. She started to count from 1 to 10 in English and Spanish” (Head Start 4K, Latinx, Some college, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs).

Table H3 illustrates how Head Start parents, including Jane and Selena, considered their children’s 4K readiness when making their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table H3]

2) Kindergarten readiness: Parents considered how 4K would help their children develop kindergarten readiness.

Head Start parents (n=7) evaluated or made their 4K decisions by looking at how 4K helped or would help their children develop social-emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten. This was related to their decisions about whether to send their children to 4K.

Four parents indicated their satisfaction with their 4K decisions because Head Start 4K prepared their children’s social-emotional and academic readiness. These parents were FRL-eligible (100%), Black (75%) or Latinx (25%), and had degrees ranging from a high school diploma (50%), to some college (25%), to B.A/More degree (25%). One of these four parents, Tasha, has a child who stayed home before the 4K year. When she made her 4K decision, she looked for a 4K program that would prepare her child to be socially-emotionally and academically ready for kindergarten: “I wanted a 4K program that would incorporate some academics into their play-based curriculum such that my child is developing the necessary academic skills along with important social skills” (Head Start 4K, Black, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). She looked for a 4K program that had a
play-based curriculum that incorporated both academic and social-emotional learning so that it could help her child’s kindergarten readiness.

Furthermore, one parent primarily considered social-emotional readiness in her decision. Eliana, whose child was in the foster care system, looked for a 4K program that would support her child’s social-emotional readiness for kindergarten.

Because our child was in the foster care system, we wanted to be able to provide her with a classroom that would work with her social and emotional development. Considering her situation, she was able to thrive in the classroom and we knew she was ready for kindergarten. (Head Start 4K, Black, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Eliana’s 4K decision-making reflected her child’s previous care experience and her expectations for an ideal environment that would help her child’s future. She was satisfied with her 4K decision because it was supportive of her child’s past and future experiences.

Lastly, two parents looked for 4K that would primarily prepare their children academically for kindergarten. They were FRL-eligible (100%), Black (50%) or Latinx (50%), and had some college experience (100%). Their children did not have special needs, and one of them had limited English proficiency. For example, Terry made her 4K decision based on what she perceived as her child’s needs. She explained, “Because I think she needed it [(academic readiness)]. Plus, she learned a lot with counting and letters” (Head Start 4K, Latinx, Some college, FRL-eligible, LEP, Without Sped needs). Looking back at her child’s 4K experience, Terry thought that her child developed a couple of skills related to academic readiness (i.e., counting and letter recognition) due to the 4K experience.

Table H4 illustrates how Head Start 4K parents, including Tasha, Eliana, and Terry, took their children’s kindergarten readiness into consideration when making their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table H4]
2. Parents considered the availability of 4K near their local areas.

None of the Head Start 4K parents talked about their consideration of the availability of 4K in the district in the open-ended survey items. Yet, to understand how the parents perceived the availability of 4K in their local areas, I referred to their closed-ended survey answers about the influence of 4K locations on their decisions. Thus, I briefly explain how location-based characteristics of 4K had at least some influence on Head Start 4K decisions. Since the parents were able to check multiple answers, the location-based characteristics they considered could be one or multiple.

Many Head Start 4K parents (n=13) viewed 4K close to their house as available and preferable; this was then followed by 4K close to their workplace (n=10) and 4K in the school/district they prefer (n=10). I found that location-based characteristics that Head Start 4K parents considered were similar to the ones of the childcare 4K parents.

Table H5 illustrates what types of location-based characteristics had at least some influence on parents, including Head Start parents and parents in other cases, for their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table H5]

**Different Sources of Information Parents Used to Decide Where to Enroll Their Children**

**For 4K**

Two Head Start 4K parents shared where they gained information about 4K for their decision-making. I used open-ended survey answers to explain this finding and closed-ended survey answers to supplement it. The sources of information that these two parents used included teachers at 4K sites, their previous childcare providers, their friends and family members, MMSD websites, and 4K program websites.
For example, Tasha gathered information about 4K from the childcare center that her child had been attending before 4K. The childcare center she referred to was a childcare partnership Head Start 4K program. She explained, “Older daughter was enrolled in a childcare center that later became a 4K program” (Head Start 4K, Black, B.A/More degree, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). For Tasha, her child’s childcare center provided her with experiential information about the 4K program on site. She shared other resources she used from the closed-ended survey answers. When making her 4K decision, she spoke with teachers or staff at 4K but did not use any of the following resources: the MMSD website, 4K program websites, childcare ratings from the YoungStar, and visits or classroom observations. From these pieces of information she shared, it is fair to conclude that she gained 4K information from teachers at her child’s previous childcare center and first-hand experiences of using her Early Head Start program during her child’s 0-3 years.

Another parent, Connor, whose child had used Early Head Start during their 0-3 years, consulted with social media and Reach Dane, which is an agency in Dane County offering Head Start 4K, for his decision. He explained that he looked at “https://www.reachdane.org (Reach Dane did the enrollment) and social media” (Head Start 4K, Black, High school graduate, FRL-eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Examining his answers to closed-ended survey questions about resources (i.e., people and websites), I learned that he also consulted with teachers or staff at 4K sites, previous childcare providers, friends/family members, the MMSD website, and 4K program websites. These pieces of information steered Connor’s decision in a particular direction because recommendations from his social circles and the local agency were already filtered through their perspectives.
Table H6 illustrates what resources Head Start 4K parents, including Tasha and Connor, used when making their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table H6]

Tasha and Connor’s sources of information were similar to the rest of the other Head Start 4K parents’ sources. These other Head Start 4K parents did not provide answers for the open-ended survey questions but did for closed-ended survey items. In the closed-ended survey items that asked parents about who helped them to make a decision, many parents (n=14) consulted with teachers or staff at 4K sites, followed by previous childcare providers (n=5) and friends/family members (n=5). When asked to report any other resources they used besides people, many parents (n=12) explained that they gained information from the MMSD website, followed by 4K program websites (n=10), visits or classroom observations (n=8), and childcare ratings from YoungStar (n=5). Since these parents were able to check off multiple answers to the questions, their sources of information could be one or more.

**Main story of Head Start 4K Parents’ Decision-Making**

Head Start 4K parents thought about *whether* and *where* they would like to send their children for 4K when making their decisions. Structural and process quality components were not mentioned, but family context-dependent quality components were discussed as their decision-making factors. To decide about 4K enrollment (*whether*), they considered whether their children were ready for 4K as well as whether 4K could support their children’s kindergarten readiness. The parents who were more likely to consider whether to enroll their children in 4K were FRL-eligible Black or Latinx mothers based on the results of both closed-ended (Table H7) and open-ended surveys. Compared to other cases (Table E14, C10, & N14),
Head Start 4K parents who had children with special needs were most likely to consider whether to enroll their children in 4K.

[Insert Table H7]

When parents decided where to send their children for 4K, they used different types of information such as their current childcare center/Early Head Start programs or websites. As indicated in Table H7, many FRL-eligible Black and Latinx mothers considered one 4K location, which was fewer than the number of locations that parents in other cases considered. Many of them also experienced the lowest stress level in the decision-making process among all cases (Table H7, E14, C10, & N14). 4K supply issues were not discussed in the open-ended survey results; however, based on the closed-ended survey results, parents looked for the availability of Head Start near their home followed by near their workplace and in their district.

Subgroup Analysis

Now I perform a subgroup analysis of the two interviewed parents who selected Head Start 4K. Table H8 shows the profiles of the two families. They were FRL-eligible Black or Latinx employed mothers with some college education. One of their children had special needs.

[Insert Table H8]

Parents’ decisions about whether to send their children

Adrianna and Joanna both considered whether their children were equipped with 4K readiness when enrolling their children in Head Start 4K. For example, Adrianna, a Latinx mother, thought that her son was not quite ready to handle 4K in a large-sized room. For this reason, she sent him to Head Start instead of 4K. It is important to note that she did not think that the Head Start program was 4K. She explained this when asked about her decision-making process:
OK. Él -- yo decidí que no fuera a 4K porque para mí Milo está muy chiquito para que estuviera en un salón tan grande Preferí que fuera a "Head start". Porque es algo más apropiado para los niños, más chiquito, para niños de su edad.

So, he decided that he wouldn't go to 4K because Milo is too little to be in such a big room. I decided that he went to "Head start" instead because it’s more appropriate for children, much smaller, for children his age.

From her perspective, the “Head Start program” rather than “4K” was the right choice for her son because she believed that young children would be better off in a smaller-sized classroom.

She later shared what might have contributed to her not knowing that there was “4K” in “Head Start.”

Adrianna: A mí me gustaria, si fuera verdad de que 4K está el mismo "Head Start", pusieran un salón específicamente para niños de 4K. Sí, una maestra específicamente de 4K porque la experiencia que tuve acá con Milo fue que niños de tres añitos y cuatro añitos en el mismo salón, haciendo las mismas actividades.

OK so, if it's true that 4K is in "Head Start", I would like to see a room that it's only for 4K. Yes, [I would like to see] a teacher specifically for 4K because the experience I had with Milo was that children of three and four years were in the same classroom, doing the same activities.

Interviewer: OK. Was Milo in the mixed-age group in the "Head Start" program?
Adrianna: De cuatro y tres años, sí.

Yes

This demonstrates that mixed-age group classrooms made her think that her son was not in “4K” but in the “Head Start program”. Because she continued using the same Head Start program, it was not clear to her which part of the day was 4K.

Interviewer: You said that your child didn’t go to 4K?
Adrianna: No.

Interviewer: Was there a 4K in the Head Start program?
Adrianna: Realmente no sé cuál fue la diferencia. Porque yo recuerdo que -- bueno, esta lo que fue de diferencia esta vez de 4K en mismo "Head Start" fue que mandaban actividades y cosas a qué seguir. Pero no cambió nada que yo recuerde de mis otras experiencias.

I really don't know the difference. The only thing that I remember is that this time in the 4K in "Head Start" they sent activities and follow-up things to do. But nothing changed that I remember from my other experiences.

Interviewer: How old was Max when he started to go to the "Head Start" program?
Adrianna: Tres años de edad. Entonces, se quedó allí hasta las cinco.

Three years old. So, he stayed there until five.
This was similar to some childcare 4K parents who continued using the same center but were not sure which part of the day was 4K. Adrianna was also not sure which part of the Head Start program was 4K because it looked the same from her eyes except for the activity-related materials that she received during the 4K year.

In addition, Adrianna was also concerned about her son’s speech delays, which played into her decision about “not sending him to 4K” but staying in the “Head Start program.” She shared what she kept in mind when deciding to send her son to the Head Start program:

Tuve que tener en cuenta -- tenía mucha preocupación por el lenguaje. Que las maestras no entendieran lo que mi niño decia cuando necesitara algo. Al igual que los otros niños lo hicieran sentir mal por no entenderle.

I had to keep in mind — I had a lot of concerns about language that the teachers wouldn't understand what he would say when he wanted something/asked for something. Or maybe the other kids would make him feel bad for not understanding him.

Adrianna’s son’s special needs made her think that he might not be socially ready for 4K. Although she also had concerns about his academic readiness (i.e., name writing, letters, and numbers), his speech delays were discussed as one of the main things that she considered for her decision. Later in the interview, she shared that she discussed her goals and concerns about her son’s academic readiness with a social worker and teacher at the Head Start program before the 4K year.

Unlike Adrianna, who thought about her child’s unreadiness for 4K, Joanna, a Black mother, thought that her son was well-prepared for 4K because Joanna and his previous childcare center teacher taught him the alphabet and numbers. She explained this when describing what she liked about the 4K experience: “By the time he was 4, he was ready to go to 4K. He was all set. He knew his ABCs from being at the daycare and being with me, and just he was always learning something, and I wanted him to be adventurous and everything.” Her description indicates that she believed her son had to be academically ready to attend 4K. Since she felt that
her son was ready for 4K, she expected him to learn more. She elaborated on how she and the
previous childcare center prepared her son’s academic readiness:

Before he went to 4K, he was at home with me. So, I was introducing him to his alphabet
and his numbers. And I know, like as a parent, I have to keep him active and around
others. So, when I was working, I kept him in a daycare setting where they focused on
getting them ready for 4K and kindergarten, for the school overall.

She shared how much her son was ready for academics with her pride in him. Her values related
to academic readiness were found when she shared her child’s 0-3, 4K, and kindergarten
experiences. The reason that she believed her son had a good academic performance was that his
educational experiences had been laying the firm groundwork for his academic learning. The
firm groundwork then continued to impact her son’s learning in kindergarten.

**Parents’ decisions about where to send their children**

Both Adrianna and Joanna referred to their older children’s Head Start 4K experiences
when making their decisions about where to send their younger children for 4K. Adrianna shared
that her decision was rather *easy* because she had already gone through the same program with
her older children and knew where to get information. She explained how she found the Head
Start 4K program:

Tenía la experiencia porque ya había pasado con mis hijos. Y ya tenía la experiencia, me
encantaba ese programa pero tuve que volver a ir a buscar la información.
I had the experience because I already had it with my older kids. And I had the
experience [because] I loved that program, but I had to search information again.

Her description shows that her first-hand experience became her valuable knowledge and
information and guided her through the Head Start 4K enrollment process.

Joanna also shared that her older children’s 4K experiences informed her about Head
Start 4K: “I have four kids and I’ve been through the [Head Start] 4K for a while.” Although 4K
enrollment for her 4K child was informed by her older children’s previous experiences with
Head Start 4K, she used to be a first-time 4K child’s mother when she sent her oldest child to 4K and had to start the decision-making process from scratch. Recalling that time, she shared that she received information from the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC) and other community programs when enrolling her oldest child in 4K. The following interview quotes tell us how she initially got the information about 4K:

**Joanna:** They have different places that you can go through like 211. When you take your kids to WIC to get their monthly and yearly checks, they give you all types of information, referring to 4K and all the programs that are going on for kids. 211 tells you all the information that you want to know, like anything that you want to know, any resources that you need. That’s something that I use too, 211 a lot. I use that a lot. I pretty much got signed up for 4K from the beginning. I want to say like a little advocate that I had when my son was first born, she would come into my house and bring him a book or a toy every time she came. It was pretty much playtime for him. Extra resources for me and that’s how I got signed up for 4K and I’ve been using it ever since. They have it where you can call a certain number and they’ll send someone out and they’ll meet with you and discuss different resources and give you tips. They give you tips on how to work with your children and on teaching them different things they need to know. They have a little Play and Learn library. You can take your kids there.

**Interviewer:** Okay. If I understood correctly, the person who came to your house to share this kind of information was from the 4K program?

**Joanna:** They deal with public health.

The resources she had were public-health-related programs such as 211, WIC, and home visitors providing information about education and care. Later in the interview, she shared that she obtained the information about home visitors through local library flyers. This indicates that she received information that was eventually related to 4K from places where she frequently visited (e.g., WIC and the library for the information about home visitors). Some sources of information were directly related to the welfare system or program which supports socio-economically under-resourced families. When asked if she would go through the same route to get information, she shared, “I’m pretty familiar with the 4K now. [...] I pretty much don’t need

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58 The WIC program supports the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 by providing foods, health information, and referrals to health care (https://publichealthmdc.com/health-services/women-infants-children-wic-program).
that anymore.” Altogether, the information that Adrianna and Joanna had access to informed their decisions about where to enroll their children for 4K.

Table H9 summarizes Head Start 4K parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K.

[Insert Table H9]

**Allocation of parents’ resources to make their children’s 4K work**

Head Start 4K parents mobilized their resources (e.g., their schedules, information sources, and their child’s special education service availability) to make their children’s 4K work.

Adrianna and Joanna are both working mothers, which made them need childcare during their work hours. Depending on their resources, how they made 4K work was different. For example, Adrianna, who works part-time in the afternoons, has a husband who works in the mornings. Their schedules worked out for their 4K child because their child attended a half-day, Head Start 4K in the morning. However, attending the morning session was not entirely Adrianna’s choice. She shared this when asked how Head Start 4K scheduling fit into her decision:

> Quizá en su momento no lo pensé. Era el único lugar que tenían disponible. Quizás si me hubieran dicho por la tarde si hay espacio pero es por la tarde y sale igual, yo lo hubiera aceptado
> Maybe at that time, I didn't really think about that. It was the only place they had availability and the only time they had availability. The only time that it was available. If they would have told me they had availability in the afternoon, I would have accepted.

Although Adrianna’s child’s schedule worked for both parents’ work schedules, she would have chosen the afternoon Head Start 4K if the availability allowed. After all, her family’s schedule and her child’s 4K schedule were coordinated nicely in that she and her husband could take turns for childcare before and after half-day 4K.
On the other hand, Joanna, who works full-time, felt that Head Start 4K hours (10 am -3 pm or 9 am - 4 pm including travel time) were not compatible with her work schedule. This made her ask her grandmother to take care of her child until she finished work. She explained how she handled her work schedule and the Head Start 4K schedule:

**Joanna:** [My work time is] pretty much from the morning, from 9 until 5. So, by the time I would get him, he would already be out of school, and at my grandma's house because that was the schedule. So, because I couldn't.

**Interviewer:** What is the center's schedule? Like, he stayed there from 9 till--?

**Joanna:** No, they would pick him up at 9. And he wouldn't get home until about 4 o'clock. So, it was like they would pick him up at 9, 4K started at 10, and he'll be there until 3, and then the bus wouldn't get him back until like 4.

Even though her child’s Head Start 4K was full day, it was still not compatible with her work schedule (9 am to 5 pm). For this reason, getting family support for childcare was immensely helpful to manage schedules for both her child and herself. Furthermore, this also benefited her grandmother because Joanna wanted to pay childcare costs to her rather than paying them to childcare providers, as became apparent when she shared how she handled wrap-around care needs when her child was attending a childcare center before 4K. Since the support from her grandmother was continued until Joanna’s child’s kindergarten year to cover her wrap-around care needs, we can infer the reason why this benefited her grandmother during the 4K as well:

**Interviewer:** So, he’s at home before daycare center, and then he went to a daycare center, and then he stayed at home?

**Joanna:** No, then he was at my grandma’s house. So, I was still at work. I was in between daycares because of the cost and everything. So, I was just paying my grandma out of pocket just to watch him.

This demonstrates that this type of family support was a two-way street.

In addition to parents’ time and financial resources, they all had transportation provided by Head Start. As Joanna described before, transportation was provided from/to Head Start 4K.
and her grandmother’s home. Adrianna’s child also had access to transportation. Adrianna explained how the pick-ups and drop-offs worked:

Adrianna: De primero sí, tenía que -- yo tenías que llevarlo pero nunca lo dejaron solo o si en una ocasión yo no estaba ahí, se estuvieron hasta que yo -- o me llamaban por teléfono hasta que yo estuviera.

At first, I had to take him [to the bus stop], but they never left him alone or in an occasion I wasn't there, they would stay until I [come] or they would call me on the phone to make sure that I was going there.

Interviewer: OK so, were you the one who always picks up your child?

Adrianna: En ocasiones su papá.

Some occasions his dad.

Based on what Joanna and Adrianna shared, transportation was not an issue for them to worry about because they also had people (e.g., parents themselves and grandmother) available for pick-ups and drop-offs at the bus stop. If one of the things — transportation or family support— were missed, their 4K experience would have been tough.

Lastly, Adrianna looked for information about special education services for her child to receive at Head Start 4K. She explained how she found her child’s speech therapist who provided the service once a week at the Head Start 4K program.

Adrianna: Contacté al -- creo que fue a través del distrito escolar. Pero yo busqué la información.

I contacted — It was through the school district [the Madison School District]. But I looked for the information myself.

Interviewer: How did you find that information?

Adrianna: Como ya tenía la experiencia con las otras hijas --Me fue un poco más fácil porque ya sabía dónde llamar.

Because I had the experience with my daughters. It was a little easier because I knew where to call.

She made sure that her child could receive the service by looking for the information herself and referenced her past experiences with her older children who also received special education services. Based on her prior knowledge about how the service worked, she had a little easier access to the information about the service during her decision-making process.
Table H10 summarizes parents’ decisions that affected how they made their children’s 4K work.

[Insert Table H10]

**Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter**

The key factors that influenced Head Start 4K parents’ decisions were the family context-dependent quality. The meanings of quality to Head Start 4K parents were a) 4K that supported their ideas about readiness, b) 4K hours/sessions that aligned with their work schedules, and c) the availability of special education services. Head Start 4K parents made their decisions about whether their children would attend 4K based on whether their children’s readiness was compatible with 4K attendance. Their values and beliefs related to readiness were mostly academic and social-emotional. They then made their decisions about where to send their children related to the information they gained. They mostly referenced their older children’s experiences, information from their current Early Head Start sites, and information from social welfare/public health-related programs. This led them to already know where to send their children and not to consider many other options. This is supported by the finding from the closed-ended survey (Table H7) that the number of 4K locations they considered was one or two locations, the lowest among all four cases. Additionally, their stress level of decision-making was generally low according to the closed-ended survey results and the interview participants’ responses. Lastly, I did not find parents’ major concerns or struggles around 4K hours, transportation, and childcare costs unlike the parents in other cases. Of course, the cost of Head Start 4K was not an issue because it was available at no cost for FRL-eligible families. The Head Start 4K parents managed 4K and their work schedules by having family support or alternative
work schedules between their family members. The provision of transportation was done without any issues.

The meaning of accessibility to Head Start 4K parents was a) access to a high-quality program that they defined as convenient hours with transportation, b) the availability of special education services, and c) access to 4K information from places they frequented. Based on what the parents shared, 4K that supported their children’s readiness, aligned with their work schedules, provided transportation, and accommodated their children’s special needs were determinants of their accessibility. Plus, how and where they gained information was critical in that it played a critical role in their 4K access.

As I conclude chapter 7, I would like to acknowledge that a relatively small number of Head Start 4K parents participated in the survey and interview. This could have prevented me from capturing MMSD Head Start 4K parents’ decision-making stories holistically and in-depth. This can be a limitation of the current study and can be further examined in future studies.
Chapter 8: No-4K

Definition of the Case and Context of No-4K

The case I present in this chapter is parents who opted out of 4K in Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). To help with the contextualized understanding of parental decision-making, I explain what options parents have when they opt out of 4K. This helps us better understand how parental no-4K decisions were situated in their life contexts and local 4K supply.

Opting out of 4K does not necessarily mean that families do not send their children to any center-based programs. In other words, families who opt out of 4K can keep their children at home or send them to home-based care, preschools, or childcare centers that do not participate in the district 4K programs. Some preschools or childcare centers that are part of the district 4K programs provide wrap-around care; for this reason, the main difference between non-district 4K programs and childcare 4K with wrap-around care is whether there is a designated time for the district 4K instruction. Yet, the quality of district 4K and non-district 4K is similar.

Children who are four years old on or before September 1st are eligible to enroll in 4K programs in MMSD. However, non-district 4K programs do not have strict age requirements. For this reason, some families in this study enrolled their children in non-district programs if their children were not eligible for 4K due to enrollment cut-off ages or if families wanted their children to repeat another 4K year after the district 4K program.

District transportation is unavailable for children who are enrolled full-time in non-district 4K at preschools or childcare centers. The reason for this is that the district provides transportation to children who attend an MMSD school in their area and transports them to childcare locations that are located more than one and one-half miles from the school.
Parents can check the quality of their preschools or childcare centers on the YoungStar website (e.g., quality ratings and licensure) if their centers participate in YoungStar in Wisconsin. This is similar to childcare 4K. If parents make a payment to their childcare centers using Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy, their childcare centers are participants of YoungStar. Parents are responsible for paying the remaining childcare costs that are not paid by the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, n.d.b). Otherwise, parents are responsible for the whole tuition of their childcare center. The price of non-district 4K programs varies. The estimated childcare cost for 4-year-old children in Dane County, Wisconsin can be found in the childcare 4K chapter.

Families in No-4K

Before examining why and how parents opted out of 4K, I present who the families were in this case. Table N1 below shows descriptive statistics of survey respondents and interview participants who opted out of 4K programs. Approximately 31% of survey respondents (174 out of 556) and about 20% of interview participants (10 out of 51) opted out of 4K programs. Also, 31 out of 51 interviewed parents happened to participate in both survey and interview; among those 31 parents, eight parents opted out of 4K.

[Insert Table N1]

As indicated in Table N1, parents who opted out of 4K were more likely to be highly educated and White whose income levels were above the Federal Poverty Thresholds (FPT). Compared to the children in other cases, children with limited English proficiency or special needs were less likely to opt out of 4K. Lastly, most parents in this case were females, children’s mothers.

To understand families’ 4K decision-making experiences transversally, I explain their childcare experiences before their 4K year and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range.
Table N2 below describes children’s kindergarten enrollment age range and parents’ answers to the closed-ended survey questions and interview questions about their children’s childcare experiences during 0-3 years old. Since parents were able to share multiple childcare arrangements in both interview and survey, an individual family’s childcare source indicated in Table N2 could be more than one.

[Insert Table N2]

As indicated in Table N2, most parents, in this case, had their children stay home during the 0-3 years and used childcare centers while some families used family daycare centers. In addition, their children’s kindergarten entrance age range was between 4.89 and 6.17. This age range of children was larger than in other cases.59

Quality Components that Parents Considered for Their No-4K Decisions

No-4K parents considered all structural, process, and family context-dependent quality components. However, many parents considered family context-dependent quality more than the other two.

Structural quality

One parent shared that he considered structural quality. Kayle—a Multiracial father—who had kept his child at home before a 4K year “needed a supportive environment with a teacher that had experience” for his 4K child (Multiracial, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above Limited English Proficiency (LEP) level, Without Special Education (Sped) needs). Years of teachers’ experiences mattered to Kayle.

Process quality

59 Age ranges of children’s kindergarten entrance are the following: 5.03-6.24 for school-based 4K; 5.01-6.05 for childcare 4K, and 5.09-5.86 for Head Start 4K.
Two White mothers, whose children had neither limited English proficiency nor special needs and whose income levels were above the FPT, decided to continue using their current preschools. They did so because of the programs’ child-led approaches, focus on community, and supportive teachers. For example, Lauren decided to stay at her child’s current preschool because she was satisfied with the instructional quality, inclusive environment, and Montessori curriculum:

We had our child in a private Montessori preschool from 18 months to 5-year-old, part-time. They did not offer 4K through the public schools. We liked the program so decided to keep her there. We wish there were a public Montessori curriculum in Madison. We like the child-led approach, focus on community, and other aspects of Montessori education.

Because she could observe process quality components while her child was using preschool during the 0-3 years, it informed her decision.

Moreover, Sofia considered supportive teachers when making her decision. Since her daughter was using preschool during her 0-3 years, she knew that the teachers would continue supporting her child’s needs:

Her preschool was already teaching to the same academic standards as MMSD 4K. We also felt she personally needed more social-emotional support rather than academic support. Her preschool teachers were familiar with and supportive of her social-emotional needs. We felt that maintaining her relationship with them and with her preschool classmates was extremely important.

Her child’s current preschool was the best option for Sofia because her child’s teacher already knew and had been supportive of her child’s social-emotional needs.

Table N3 shows the structural and process quality that parents considered for their decision-making:

[Insert Table N3]
Family context-dependent quality that reflects key constructs in the accommodations framework

Parents who opted out of 4K considered the following family context-dependent quality:

a) children’s readiness, b) continuity and familiarity with their current childcare centers or preschools, c) affordability, and d) availability of special education services.

1. Readiness and curriculum: Parents considered their beliefs and values related to readiness and curriculum when making their decisions.

During the decision-making processes, parents considered whether their children were ready to attend 4K and kindergarten and how non-district 4K programs could support their children’s readiness development. Some parents considered their children’s readiness to choose options between 4K and kindergarten because they missed an enrollment cut-off age in the previous year; this finding is related to no-4K children’s kindergarten entrance age range that I explained earlier. Further, parents’ beliefs and values related to readiness were related to their preferences for curriculum, influencing their decisions about where to send their children.

1) 4K readiness: Parents opted out of 4K because their children were already equipped with skills and knowledge for 4K.

Parents (n=20) who opted out of 4K considered whether their children were ready for 4K when making their decisions. To be precise, their children’s 4K readiness was a reference point for them to decide whether their children needed district 4K programs. If their children had 4K readiness, they sent them to non-district 4K programs or kept their children at home. This was different from school-based 4K parents who viewed 4K as a program where their children could attend with 4K readiness. These 20 parents were more likely to be White (65%) whose income
levels were above the FPT (95%) and have B.A/More degrees (90%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (15%) and special needs (0%).

For example, Rob used his understanding of how much his son developed 4K readiness at his in-home childcare center when deciding whether he needed 4K.

I liked how he was developing at the play-based in-home center we had him in since he was a baby. He could sound out words, had friends, and engaged in complex imaginative play. He also showed signs of stress in unfamiliar settings and was very young for his grade. So, I was hesitant as to when and whether to do a 4K program through MMSD. (White, B.A/More degree, Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)-Eligible, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

4K readiness was the sign for him that his son did not need to attend the district 4K program. Similarly, Zenn also thought 4K was not necessary for her daughter to attend: “I thought [my child] was up to speed on all of these [(physical, social-emotional, academic, and school readiness)] if not on the advanced side of things and was fine where she was and did not need to attend a formal 4K program” (White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP-Missing, Without Sped needs). The rest of the 18 parents also shared similar reasons for not choosing 4K programs.

Table N4 shows how various parents, including Rob and Zenn, talked about how their perceptions about their children’s 4K readiness influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table N4]

2) Kindergarten readiness: Parents’ ideas about kindergarten readiness influenced their decisions.

a) Parents considered their children’s kindergarten readiness to decide whether to enroll their children in non-district 4K programs or kindergarten.

Unique to the no-4K case, there were two different groups of parents who debated between two options—non-district 4K and kindergarten—based on their beliefs/values related
to kindergarten readiness. The first group of parents (n=6) opted out of 4K because they decided to either have their children repeat the 4K year in the non-district 4K programs or send their children straight to kindergarten. The underlying reason for this decision boiled down to kindergarten readiness. That is, these parents wanted to wait until their children were equipped with kindergarten readiness. For this reason, their decisions were related to whether to send their children to non-district 4K to repeat the 4K year. While this group of parents was of diverse races, they were all B.A/More degree holders whose income levels were above the FPT. Their children did not have limited English proficiency or special needs. As an example, Florence shared that she debated whether or not her child needed to repeat the 4K year to be ready for kindergarten:

I thought about [my child’s social-emotional, academic, and school readiness], but since my child was in a private 4K program for young 4-year-olds I had the option to have her repeat 4K before kindergarten in the older 4-year-old program. I was more concerned with deciding if she was ready for kindergarten or if she should do another year of older 4 years old 4K this year. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Because her child’s preschool was not registered as the district 4K program, her daughter had an option to repeat the 4K year at her current preschool. What Florence considered was whether her child was ready to attend kindergarten without repeating the 4K year. She ended up sending her child to kindergarten during the 2017-18 school year rather than repeating the 4K year.

The second group of parents (n=6) opted out of 4K because their children’s birthdays passed the cut-off dates for 4K, and their children were ready to attend kindergarten. Since these parents could not enroll their children in the district 4K in the previous school year, they either looked for non-district 4K programs or kept them at home during that year. In the following year (2017-18 school year), they debated whether to send their children to 4K or kindergarten based on their readiness. These parents were parents of color whose income levels were above the FPT
and who had B.A/More degrees. Their race was Latinx (n=2), Black (n=1), and Asian (n=1). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (17%) and special needs (0%).

For example, Carlos, whose child’s birthday was past September 1st, decided to skip 4K and enroll his child in kindergarten instead:

My child did not qualify for 4K because of the September 1st cut-off date. Her birthday is later in September. It was a disappointment as she was ready for it and had already gone to pre-school. I chose to skip 4K this school year and early enroll her in kindergarten this year because, once again, she was ready. It would be really great if the same enrollment dates (with an option to early enroll) were in place for 4K and kindergarten. Too late for us, but school children starting up in the coming years. (No-4K, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Carlos considered both 4K and kindergarten enrollment. However, there were no reasons not to send his daughter to kindergarten: she was ready for kindergarten, and the district 4K enrollment requirement was not compatible with his child’s 4K enrollment timeline.

Another parent, Diana, pondered not only whether her child was ready for kindergarten but which option might also save her family’s childcare costs:

Our daughter has a September birthday--so while she was in a 4K preschool classroom during the 2016-2017 academic year, she was not officially enrolled in 4K (because she was not age-eligible). This year (2017-2018), she would've been age-eligible to go through the 4K program at her former preschool, but for various reasons, we decided to send her to kindergarten during this year, which should technically have been her 4K year. She is academically pretty advanced, and our preschool was incredibly expensive, even with a 4K subsidy, so we chose to go ahead and send her despite our concerns about social development and the demands of kindergarten. (No-4K, Multiracial, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Although her family had an option to have her daughter repeat her 4K year during the 2017-18 school year, sending her child to kindergarten was a good decision for her child and her family.

Table N5 shows how various parents, including Carlos and Diana, talked about their decisions about whether to enroll their children in non-district 4K or kindergarten:
b) Parents hoped their children would develop kindergarten readiness at their current non-district 4K programs.

Parents (n=35) considered whether non-district 4K programs could help their children develop kindergarten readiness when making their decisions. The readiness dimensions they explained included general kindergarten, social-emotional, and academic readiness.

Parents (n=7) expected their non-district 4K programs would help their children to develop general kindergarten readiness. This was indicated when they wanted their children to be “well-prepared for kindergarten” and “prepared far past kindergarten standards.” These parents were least likely to be underserved than those who valued particular readiness dimensions (e.g., academic and social-emotional readiness). As an example of this group, Jacob opted out of district 4K because his current family daycare center already had supported his child’s kindergarten readiness well before the 4K year:

In our case, our care provider outside of the home left our child well-prepared for kindergarten without a formalized 4K program. This left us with a comfort level to consider but ultimately decide against, enrollment in a 4K program. Our younger son is now with the same care provider, but the care provider is retiring around the time our son would be ready for 4K - so for him, we may end up doing a 4K program. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

While his older son benefited from the family daycare provider for kindergarten readiness development, his younger child’s enrollment decision would be different because the daycare center would not function at the same level as before.

In addition, five parents out of 35 parents expected non-district 4K programs to support their children’s academic readiness for kindergarten during the decision-making processes.

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60 These parents were more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT (100%) and B.A/More degree holders (86%). Their children did not have special needs and were less likely to have limited English proficiency (14%).
These parents described academic readiness as “learning,” “academic,” and “literacy, math, art, and science.” These parents were most likely to be underserved compared to the parents who valued general kindergarten, social-emotional, or both social-emotional and academic readiness dimensions. For example, Molly looked for a program that could prepare her child’s academic rather than social-emotional readiness: “We were seeking a program that was focused on early literacy, math, art, and science to ensure kindergarten readiness. Behavioral training was less of a factor, as our daughter gained those skills at pooh bear childcare” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Since she believed that her child’s childcare center already helped her child to gain social-emotional readiness, her child’s academic readiness was the main focus of the non-district 4K program search.

Furthermore, six parents out of 35 parents considered both social-emotional and academic readiness when making no-4K decisions. These parents were more likely to be White (66%) whose income levels were above the FPT (84%) and have B.A/More degrees (66%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (17%) and special needs (0%). For example, Karl, whose child had not attended any center-based childcare centers before the 4K year, considered whether a non-district 4K program could help his child develop readiness in both areas:

Because he did not attend a 'regular' daycare, our primary concerns were with 'socializing', especially learning how to deal with being part of a larger group. We were also somewhat interested in having him stimulated academically and learning things like counting and letters, though we did not have specific goals in that regard. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Although he put different weights on social-emotional and academic readiness, he considered both when making his decision.

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61 These parents were more likely to be FRL-eligible (60%), White (60%) with B.A/More degrees (80%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (40%) and special needs (0%).
Lastly, 17 parents out of 35 parents considered their children’s social-emotional readiness for kindergarten when making their decisions. These parents described social-emotional readiness as “social-emotional skill building” and “kindness and empathy” building. These parents\(^6\) were less likely to be underserved than the parents who valued academic readiness or both social-emotional and academic readiness. As an example of this group, Lucy explained what she expected the non-district 4K program to support for her child: “We had no achievement-gap concerns for our child but appreciated her opportunity to practice social-emotional skill-building, kindness/empathy, and to get a taste of what a kindergarten classroom would be like” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Lucy contrasted her preference for social-emotional readiness with academic readiness to emphasize what she looked for when enrolling her child in the non-district 4K program.

Table N6 shows how various parents, including Jacob, Molly, Karl, and Lucy, talked about how their expectations of their children’s kindergarten readiness influenced their decision-making:

3) **School readiness: Parents’ expectations of their children's school readiness influenced their decision-making.**

Parents (n=23) considered whether non-district 4K programs could help their children develop school readiness. Almost all parents (n=19) wanted their children to gain an understanding of what school would be like. The word “school” here was not referring to a school-based 4K. Rather, it referred to the parents’ ideas of a formal educational setting. These parents were more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT (83%) and have B.A/More degrees (94%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (29%) and special needs (0%).

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\(^6\) These parents were more likely to be White whose income levels were above the FPT (83%) and have B.A/More degrees (94%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (29%) and special needs (0%).
parents were more likely to be White (74%) and B.A/More degree holders (85%) whose income levels were above the FPT (89%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (32%) and special needs (0%). These parents’ decisions were related to whether to enroll their children in non-district 4K.

For example, Aiden, whose child stayed at home before the 4K year, decided to enroll his son in a non-district 4K program to support his school readiness: “I wanted him to see what school was about so that the transition to kindergarten would not be a shock” (No-4K, Black, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Aiden believed that exposing his son to a formal educational setting would help his child to be accustomed to a school-like setting, leading to a smooth transition to kindergarten.

In addition, four parents expected non-district 4K programs to help their children learn about school routines, rules, and expectations. They believed that this type of learning also would ease their children’s transition to kindergarten. These parents were more likely to be White (80%) and B.A/More degree holders (80%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (20%) and special needs (0%).

For example, Xara, whose child stayed at home before the 4K year, enrolled her daughter in the non-district 4K program to learn about navigating through social rules and expectations in the formal educational setting:

We were not as concerned with the academic preparation she would receive as we don't find that a crucial piece of the puzzle for 4-year-olds. We value her ability to navigate social situations appropriately and learn how to exist in a busy, fast-moving classroom environment over being able to read when she entered kindergarten. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP-Missing, Without Sped needs)
Xara believed that reading the room was an important skill to learn so that her daughter could navigate social scenes and handle implicit classroom expectations well.

Table N7 shows how various parents, including Aiden and Xara, talked about how expectations of their children’s school readiness influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table N7]

4) Parents’ preferences for Montessori or play-based curriculum influenced their decisions.

Parents’ preferences for curriculum influenced their decisions about where to send their children. In particular, these parents (n=11) believed that Montessori or play-based curricula would better support their children’s readiness. These parents were more likely to be White (90%) and B.A/More degree holders (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (10%) and special needs (18%). For example, Kimberly continued her child’s non-district 4K program because of their child-led approach and Montessori curriculum:

We had our child in a private Montessori preschool from 18 months to 5 years old, part-time. They did not offer 4K through the public schools. We liked the program so decided to keep her there. We wish there were a public Montessori curriculum in Madison. We like the child-led approach and focus on community and other aspects of Montessori education. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Since district 4K does not provide a Montessori curriculum, Kimberly decided to keep her child in her current preschool due to her preference for its curriculum. Another parent, Annabelle, also considered her preference for curriculum when making her decision. She particularly looked for a childcare center that had a child-centered play-based curriculum for her child, who had stayed at home before the 4K year: “I think that a child-centered play-based 4K system is best. As an educator, it seems best to provide opportunities for social play and some academics that are primarily done through exploration” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above
LEP level, Sped needs). She believed that a child-centered play-based curriculum could provide her child with a balanced learning opportunity for both social-emotional and academic readiness.

Table N8 shows how various parents, including Kimberly and Annabelle, talked about how their preferences in curriculum influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table N8]

2. **Continuity and familiarity:** Parents believed that continuity in using their current non-district 4K worked for both their children and parents themselves.

Parents continued using their current non-district-4K for their children and themselves. First, parents believed their children would benefit from this continuity. Many parents (n=43) decided to continue using the same non-district 4K that their children had been attending before the 4K year to provide stability for their children. By stability, they meant a smaller number of transitions that their children had to experience during the day as well as familiarity they already had with their current site. This led them to make decisions about where to enroll their children during the 4K year.

Parents (n=41) also considered continuity of the site due to their children’s personality and needs, their satisfaction with their current sites, and the unavailability of full-day elementary 4K. These parents were more likely to be White (85%) and B.A./More degree holders (98%) whose income levels were above the FPT (98%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (5%) and special needs (7%). Allison, for example, considered continuing her child’s non-district 4K program because of her child’s personality and familiarity with her current preschool:

> From what I know about my child I felt that keeping her at her current preschool would provide coherence and stability for her as I transitioned back to full-time work. She was already very familiar with the staff and the student community. She was at the time also a bit reserved with adults, so keeping her at this school seemed like the best choice for her.
Because her child was reserved with adults, the familiarity that her child already had with the current preschool was good to have. A similar reason was also applied to a parent of a child with special needs. Noah wanted to make sure to give fewer transitions during the day to his child who had Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):

My child has ADHD. I ultimately decided to keep him at his private Montessori 4K because we were adjusting his plan of care and he was struggling with escalating behaviors during transitions. I thought that continuity of care was best for him during this phase. (No-4K, Black, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

Like Allison and Noah, parents considered their child’s personality or special needs when making their decision about staying at the same center.

Further, some parents decided to stay at the same childcare center due to their satisfaction with the quality of it. For example, Corey shared why her decision about staying at the same center was easy: “All of these measures [(physical, social-emotional, academic, and school readiness)] were important to us, and everything was going very well in her childcare center, which was also 5-star accredited, so the decision to continue that course was easy” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs). Rather than having unnecessary changes, she preferred continuing the same childcare service because she was satisfied with the quality of the center. Her satisfaction with the quality was also supported by the quality rating of the center, which justified her decision as well.

Moreover, Nicolas considered a relationship between the half-day elementary 4K and his child’s adjustment in 4K and kindergarten for his 4K decision. He explained how keeping his child in his current non-district 4K was better than sending his child to elementary 4K:

The hours are so short for 4K. I would absolutely send my kids to public school 4K if the day were a little bit longer. My child is used to a six-hour school day, and it would be weird to send him to public 4K for such a short day and then expect him to re-transition
back to a 7:20 - 3:00 school day for kindergarten. Right? If he's used to a six-hour day, why switch him to a shorter day only to switch back again a year later? Also, finding start and end times for a particular school is crazy to find. (When does the bus come, when does it drop off, how long are they actually in the classroom, etc.). (No-4K, Black, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Although he wanted to enroll his child in elementary 4K, he thought it then would introduce unnecessary transitions from the full-day childcare center to half-day elementary 4K back to full-day kindergarten for his child. For his child’s adjustment to full-day kindergarten, a half-day 4K schedule was considered an impediment. For this reason, he decided to continue using the current childcare center during the 4K year.

Lastly, parents’ decisions about staying at their non-district 4K were also related to the unavailability of 4K in their kindergarten schools. For this reason, this decision resulted from parents’ perceptions of a 4K supply. These parents (n=2) thought staying at the same place would prevent their children from having avoidable transitions from the 0-3 setting, 4K, to kindergarten if they had to attend each 4K and kindergarten at different schools. These parents were White and B.A/More degree holders whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Their children did not have special needs, but one of them had limited English proficiency.

For example, Jasmine weighed two options: keeping her child at the current Montessori school and sending her child to an elementary 4K that was not at her child’s kindergarten school. She explained why she decided to have her child stay at the Montessori school: “My daughter stayed at her preschool for the 4K year because she would have to go to 4K at a site that would not be her kindergarten site. I was not going to switch her two times for 4K and then again for kindergarten. So, she stayed at Montessori” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). She did a cost-benefit analysis to determine which one would be better for her child. The option that allowed her child to have fewer transitions won.
Table N9 shows how various parents, including Allison, Noah, Corey, Nicholas, and Jasmine, talked about how their values related to familiarity and continuity influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table N9]

Furthermore, continuing to use the same non-district 4K benefited parents (n=37) as well because that was the way they could address their limited time-related resources. Due to their employment commitment, they looked for full-time childcare that took care of their children and reduced constraints in transportation during their work hours. Even if they decided to use elementary 4K, transportation was a big constraint because it was difficult or even impossible for parents to transport their children from/to different childcare locations unless the district provided transportation from 4K to wrap-around care. Because of these logistical constraints, these parents’ decisions were related to whether and where their children would go to 4K. These 37 parents were more likely to be White (70%) and B.A/More degree holders (89%) whose income levels were above the FPT (95%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (24%) and special needs (0%).

For instance, Marie and her husband worked 40 hours, seven days a week. For this reason, they needed to find a full-time childcare center that took care of either wrap-around care or transportation:

The hours for 4K are NOT conducive to having two working parents. Unless the daycare happens to link up with a 4K program in your district and provides transportation, the hours for 4K are basically impossible. Kids start after normal work hours and are done before lunch. Unless you happen to have that childcare transportation, nanny, or friend/relative that can help out, 4K is impossible. At least it was for us and was never an option. We felt confident in the childcare/preschool program the child was already in and felt that between that and the support that she received at home that she was lucky to be well prepared for kindergarten this year and has been thriving. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)
Due to her family’s constraints in time-related resources and transportation, her family perceived that the half-day 4K was not even an option for them. This was because it was simply impossible without any support from their social circles or the district. What Marie explained tells us that at least either full-time childcare or transportation should have been guaranteed for families to truly consider multiple 4K options and to make 4K work.

Similarly, another parent, Julian, also needed to find a full-time childcare center to handle his wrap-around care needs and transportation. Due to these logistical constraints, he could not send his child to the elementary 4K located right next to his house:

As a two-parent working household, our main need was wrap-around childcare. I liked the idea of having my son at his daycare center the entire day, and not having to worry about transportation. Since our daycare was out of the MMSD I was grateful for open enrollment. We live a block away from Gregory Elementary, but we would have had to make completely different childcare arrangements to attend there. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Even though elementary 4K was right near his house, it was more complicated to arrange different childcare arrangements to attend elementary 4K. For this reason, continuing the use of the same childcare center outside the district was the better option for his family’s schedule.

Table N10 shows how various parents, including Marie and Julian, talked about how their resources and 4K supply influenced their decision-making about continuing to use their non-district 4K sites:

[Insert Table N10]

3. Affordability: Affordability could not be ignored when parents made decisions.

Compared to childcare 4K parents, parents who opted out of 4K (n=11) explained more about the affordability which was one of the key factors that influenced their 4K decisions. The reason these parents shared was that cost for non-district 4K was not considerably lower compared to the cost of attending both elementary 4K and wrap-around care. For this reason,
even though they wanted to enroll their children in elementary 4K, they decided to use non-district 4K programs or keep their children at home. As a result, their decisions were related to whether and where they would like to enroll their children in 4K. These parents were B.A/More degree holders whose income levels were above the FPT (100%) and racially diverse. Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (36%) and special needs (0%). Their demographics tell us that parents’ financial resources played into their decision-making even though their income levels were above the FPT.

As an example, Cameron neither could choose elementary 4K due to the cut-off date nor childcare 4K because of the cost:

This all [(my child’s skills)] in the end is not relevant as I soon found out I could not send my child to 4K. It was frustrating as she seemed so ready and had friends slightly older than her who could go. Her birthday is later in September after the September 1st cut-off date. Each of those abilities did convince me my daughter was ready to attend 4K. But she couldn't unless I paid for it and that was too expensive for me. (No-4K, Latinx, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Even though she thought her child was ready to attend 4K, she was bound by double constraints in enrolling her child in 4K: the district’s age cut-off for attending free, elementary 4K, and the affordability of sending her child to childcare 4K where she had to pay full tuition. These constraints led her to decide not to enroll her child in any type of 4K.

On the contrary, Jenny, whose child had stayed at home before the 4K year, enrolled her child in non-district 4K due to her wrap-around care needs. Despite its expensive tuition, she felt fortunate that her family could afford the expensive cost of preschool:

Cost. The full-time 4K option we chose through our preschool was much more expensive than the MMSD program. We couldn't choose MMSD however because our preschool didn't have wrap-around care and luckily our family can afford the higher cost. I bet others have to make a different choice. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, LEP, Without Sped needs)
Jenny assumed that her family’s affordability of preschool made a difference compared to other families’ decisions. Based on what Cameron and Jenny shared, parents’ affordability could limit or expand their 4K options.

Table N11 shows how various parents, including Cameron and Jenny, talked about how their financial resources influenced their decision-making:

[Insert Table N11]

4. Special education services: Parents of children with special needs considered the availability of special education services in their decisions.

Two parents looked for programs that allowed their children to have special education services. Their decisions were related to where to send their children based on the availability of the services. These parents were White and B.A/More degree holders whose income levels were above the FPT; they did not have children with limited English proficiency and special needs in their kindergarten year.

To take one of the parents as an example, when Eli made his 4K decision, he prioritized whether his child could get special education services with support from the school:

My son was assessed by MMSD with significant delays in social and adaptive categories when he was a 3-years-old in preschool. I wanted to pick a program that would allow for the continuation of his Individualized Education Program (IEP) services as well as make sure his teachers and school leadership were going to be willing and helpful partners.

(No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Sped needs)

Based on Eli’s explanation, he would not consider the options that did not provide services and responsive support for his child’s special needs.

Table N12 shows how parents like Eli talked about how the availability of special education services at programs influenced their 4K decisions:

[Insert Table N12]
Parents accessed 4K information through different venues when finding out which 4K program provided high-quality that they defined and deciding where to send their children. Many parents (n=63) used social resources to get information about 4K options. They used the following sources of information: a) their current childcare centers/preschools where their children had been attending from 0-3 years, b) other parents and online parent communities, and c) districts and community programs.

First, 41 out of 63 parents easily gained information about the quality of their site by using their current childcare centers or preschools. It was one of the perks parents could have as “current childcare families,” which was helpful when making their 4K decisions. These parents were more likely to be White (85%), B.A/More degree holders (97%) whose income levels were above the FPT (97%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (5%) and special needs (5%). For example, Keith kept his child in his current site because he was confident that the quality of his child’s current childcare center would not be considerably different from elementary 4K based on his observations: “For us, it was important to stay at the same facility knowing that his level of education would be on par with the MMSD 4K he could have received” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). The level of education was the quality criteria that Keith considered. Another parent, Kyle, also kept his child in his current childcare center because he was confident that the center would prepare his child for kindergarten from what he had seen: “I knew the selected program does an excellent job at making sure the children are kindergarten-ready” (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Teachers’ instruction to prepare children for kindergarten was considered an important quality to him. As
Keith and Kyle shared, they could find out if their childcare centers would provide the quality they wanted because they had chances to observe it as *insiders*.

In addition, eight out of 63 parents gained information from other parents and online parent communities. These parents were more likely to be White (62%), B.A/More degree holders (87%) whose income levels were above the FPT (75%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (38%) and special needs (13%). For example, Eva asked “other parents of same-aged children” and looked at “[the] Internet mommy board” to be informed about 4K options (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). What’s more, Kiera, who was learning English as a second language, gained information about 4K from “people from [the] community center who gave English class for adults” (No-4K, Latinx, Some college, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs).

Finally, 14 out of 63 parents gained information from teachers, districts, or social programs (i.e., Play and Learn). These parents were more likely to be White (57%), B.A/More degree holders (100%) whose income levels were above the FPT (100%). Their children were less likely to have limited English proficiency (21%) and special needs (0%). For example, some of the parents gained information from their child’s “MMSD Speech/Language team” (Milo, No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs), "Play and Learn staff" (Noam, No-4K, Black, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs), and "teachers at non-4K sites" (Duke, No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs). Another parent, Maria, reached out to the district to access the information about the MMSD summer 4K after spending the 4K year at the non-district-4K program:

There was not enough information sent to parents following enrollment in the MMSD summer school 4K. I had to make several phone calls to get teacher names, school
supply/material lists, classroom numbers, etc. Once the program started, we found it to be beneficial for our daughter. We were not able to participate in the MMSD 4K during the school year, as it was only 1/2 day, and there was no wrap-around care. Hence, she also went through the private 4K at Little Things. (No-4K, White, B.A/More degree, Above the FPT, Above LEP level, Without Sped needs)

Because Maria felt that the information about the 4K summer program was not readily available to parents, she had to ask the district directly to get the information she needed.

Table N13 shows how various parents, including Keith, Kyle, Eva, Milo, Noam, Duke, and Maria, talked about how they gained information about 4K programs to make their decisions:

[Insert Table N13]

**Main story of No-4K Parents’ Decision-Making**

Parents who opted out of 4K thought about both *whether* and *where* they would like to send their children to 4K. Although they considered structural and process quality components, what drove them to make a final decision was mostly family context-dependent quality.

Unlike elementary 4K parents who wanted to make sure their children were ready to attend 4K, no-4K parents’ decisions about *whether* to send their children to 4K were split in two: keeping their children at home or sending them to non-district 4K programs when they felt their children had 4K readiness. Moreover, parents of children whose birthdays were near or past the age cut-off dates thought about whether their children needed to repeat 4K in non-district 4K or whether they needed to attend kindergarten bypassing the 4K. In addition to 4K readiness, parents also thought about whether their non-district 4K could prepare their children’s kindergarten and school readiness. According to the findings from the closed-ended survey (Table N14) and open-ended survey, these parents who thought about whether to enroll their children in 4K were more likely to be White fathers whose income levels were above the FPT.
and who did not have children with limited English proficiency and special needs. Further, compared to elementary and childcare 4K parents (Table E14 & C10), White mothers whose income levels were above the FPT in the no-4K case were much more likely to consider whether to enroll their children in 4K than elementary 4K but less than childcare 4K parents. However, they were less likely to consider 4K enrollment than both elementary and childcare 4K parents when their children had limited English proficiency or special needs.

[Insert Table N14]

In addition, parents considered where to send their children for 4K. Their reasons were related to the continuity of using the same childcare center that their family was already familiar with and also their preferences for play-based or Montessori curricula. Some parents’ decisions for enrolling their children in non-district 4K programs were because of the unavailability of 4K at their kindergarten schools and the unavailability of full-day elementary 4K. Moreover, families’ affordability of childcare centers was discussed even among parents whose income levels were above the FPT.

The number of 4K locations that parents considered was generally low. This aligns with the findings from the closed-ended survey (Table N14). Many no-4K parents considered zero to two locations. Based on open-ended survey analysis, this was because many of them either continued using the same childcare center or kept their children at home due to logistical constraints; it was also attributed to the information they gained through social resources, which was already filtered so that their perceived options were already narrowed down. However, the number of locations that no-4K parents considered was up to six, which was more than the number of options elementary and childcare 4K parents considered (Table E14 & C10). Yet,
these no-4K parents experienced at least a “somewhat” level of stress, which was similar to elementary 4K parents but less than childcare 4K parents.

**Subgroup Analysis**

I now present a subgroup analysis using interview data. I selected seven parents who could best tell the main story of this case and reflect the findings from Table N14. Table N15 indicates the profiles of families who will be presented in the subgroup analysis. It is worth noting that all no-4K parents’ children did not have limited English proficiency and special needs.

[Insert Table N15]

**Parents’ decisions about whether to send their children for 4K**

1. **4K readiness: Parents thought about their children’s 4K readiness for their decisions.**

   Depending on parents’ beliefs about whether their children were equipped with 4K readiness, no-4K parents made two different decisions: enrolling their children in non-district 4K or keeping them at home.

   **1) Parents’ decisions about non-district 4K enrollment**

   Three mothers whose income levels were above the FPT enrolled their children in non-district 4K programs. The reasons behind their decisions were because they believed that their children were ready for the challenges of the kindergarten year or not quite ready for an elementary 4K environment. For example, Vivian, a White mother whose income level was above the FPT, decided to have her daughter stay at the same childcare center for the 4K year partially because she perceived that her daughter was up for the challenge. She explained why she decided to send her daughter to a 4K classroom when her childcare director offered her 4K:

   “The childcare director talked with us about 4K and said, ‘we think she’s ready to move up.’
And we wanted to move her to a 4K classroom. We thought she was ready for the challenge, and we thought she was getting a little bored in the 3K classroom.” Not only did the childcare director think that her child was ready to be challenged, but Vivian also felt the same. Later in the interview, she elaborated on how she expected her child to be challenged in the 4K classroom when describing the difference between 4K and 3K classrooms:

There was clearly a difference in how the old classrooms had been running where there are just classroom supplies and how 4K was being run where children had to take responsibility for their things. We started getting a sense early on way before she would’ve started 4K about what it meant to be in the 4K classroom and how they were running it differently and encouraging the children to take more responsibility for their materials and their choices. I think that helped us understand how this did feel like a school that she would be going into and would help her prepare for that. We were continuing to see her grow and accelerate in those.

Because Vivian believed that 4K would support her child’s school readiness (e.g., taking more responsibility for her materials and choices), there was no reason not to enroll her child in the 4K classroom. Looking back at the 4K experience after her daughter’s kindergarten year, Vivian felt that the 4K experience helped her child to have school and academic readiness, making her satisfied with her decision. She described how 4K helped her child’s kindergarten experience:

She was also prepared in terms of managing her expectations for how to manage the day, sitting in the classroom, listening to the teacher, participating in group work, and going crazy at recess. All these pieces she understood and was very comfortable with. So, I think for her she was ready to sort of hit the ground running. There were no major shocks for her going into kindergarten other than the Spanish piece. [...] I think [our childcare center] was just amazing because I can't think of anything they could have done to prepare her more. The really wonderful teacher at Little Things speaks Spanish, and she spoke Spanish with a couple of native Spanish speakers in that daycare.

Because her child’s center happened to have a Spanish bilingual teacher, it was a plus factor that challenged and prepared her child to adjust better to the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) kindergarten.
Similarly, Kayla — a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— also enrolled her son in a 4K classroom to support his smooth transition to kindergarten because she felt that his readiness was beyond a 4K level. In the survey, she shared, “I wanted to make sure the transition to kindergarten was as smooth as possible.” After her son’s kindergarten entrance, she realized how 4K supported his social-emotional, academic, and school readiness:

I think he was used to structure, routine, working with classmates, being in a classroom setting, understanding and following other people’s rules, and having that ability to have social-emotional interactions with other kids. He also already knew his letters and numbers. He was an emerging reader at the time. So, he had mastered many of the skills [in 4K] that a lot of kids did master in kindergarten.

She felt proud that her son hit the kindergarten readiness mark earlier than other children. She gave non-district 4K big credit for it.

Contrary to Vivian and Kayla, Maya — a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT— enrolled her son in non-district 4K because she thought he was not ready for a giant elementary school environment due to his sensory challenges:

He wasn’t ready to be in a giant school environment. It was just for him. That was the best decision. He had established relationships already with the kids he was with. [...] It was hard enough for him to transition to the 4K room and have it more structured than it had been in the previous classroom. Having the kids that he knew was really key for him, too. Starting over and being brand new with new adults and new kids, I think he would’ve just freaked out.

Rather than enrolling her son in elementary 4K, she decided to stay at the same childcare center for 4K because stability and familiarity were the most important for her son not to be overly stimulated. She later explained more about his needs:

We definitely made some of these decisions knowing our son has some neurological differences in some ways. It’s not really visible to other people, but because of his sensory challenges, we factored in some of these changes and then new people into our decisions.
Maya thought about what would be best for her child’s sensory needs would be. Maya, Vivian, and Kayla all thought about their children’s readiness. However, Maya’s decision was **whether** to enroll her child in district 4K, whereas Vivian and Kayla’s decisions were more about **whether to move** to the 4K classroom within their current non-district childcare center. In the end, the results of their decisions looked the same.

2) **Parents’ decisions about having their children stay at home**

Two parents who cared for their children at home during the 4K year also pondered **whether** their children were ready to attend 4K. However, their exact reasons for their final decisions were different.

Joel—a White father whose income level was above the FPT—decided to keep his son at home with his stay-home wife because his son was socially and emotionally ready. He explained why his child did not need to attend 4K:

> The only thing he would be kind of getting in addition to staying at home would be just kind of being in a school structure or the environment and some of those social interactions. But then we also know what he is like. When he would be around other kids or in social situations, we were kind of watching if he is awkward and he is playing with other kids. We didn't see any kind of hesitation, awkwardness, inappropriateness, not playing well with others, not engaged with others, or not inappropriately playing. There wasn't anything that seemed out of the ordinary when it came to those social interactions. We felt comfortable having him quote, unquote, miss out on that experience in 4K.

Joel believed that 4K was to support children’s social-emotional readiness, so he believed that his child who was socially-emotionally ready had no problem with missing 4K. On top of that, he believed that 4K would not add much learning to what his child was learning at home: “It’s like he was basically getting the same things he’d be getting at 4K he was getting at home.” He acknowledged that his family had the privilege that allowed his child to learn in a supportive home environment:
That's just for us. We have a bazillion books at home. We have all kinds of engaging toys or manipulatives where they can be creative. We have flexible schedules to take them outside and go for walks and go to the park or just let them mess around with sticks and rocks and just create things. That is very nice and we're fortunate to have that. But, this isn't just about me and my family. Like, what about those other families that don't have those things or they aren't able to stay home?

His decision about non-4K enrollment was feasible because of his stay-at-home wife and his educationally rich home environment. Even after his child’s kindergarten year, Joel did not regret his decision based on his observation of his child in kindergarten.

Slightly different, Eleanor — an FRL-eligible White mother— kept her son at home because he was not ready for changes in his life. This was because she recently separated from her abusive husband, so she wanted to provide stability for her son by staying with him at home:

It’s always been at home with me actually because I left their dad when the kids were three. One because he was abusive and he didn’t see [my children] even for a long time, but now he’s starting to see them again. And [my 4K child] has problems because he witnessed a lot and his one comfort has always been with me and I felt like when I left, “Do I want to change his whole life, have him go to a daycare now?” and I thought no, he needs to have some familiarity. We already just moved.

Eleanor’s decision resulted from a combination of her home environment and her son’s social-emotional well-being status. Since she was working at night at the restaurant, she was able to stay with her children during the day. Her family members and boyfriend cared for her children during her work hours at night.

These two parents had varied reasons for keeping their children at home during the 4K year. This was possible because one of the parents in the household or family members nearby were able to take care of their children for some time. This type of resource could have offset the disadvantages or bolstered privileges resulting from class and gender. Although their decision-making reasons were different, they all considered their children’s social-emotional readiness or well-being when making their decisions.
2. Kindergarten readiness: Parents considered their children’s kindergarten readiness for their decisions about opting out of 4K.

Uniquely in the case of no-4K, parents pondered whether their children were ready for kindergarten without 4K. These parents were more likely to have sons whose birthdays were right before or past the district age cut-off dates regardless of race and class. Their decisions were either keeping their children at home or enrolling them in a non-district 4K depending on how ready their children were for kindergarten or how parents wanted their children to develop kindergarten readiness.

Two mothers whose income levels were above the FPT had children whose birthdays were in October and July, which influenced their no-4K decisions. For example, Naomi—a Black mother—has a son with an October birthday. Because of the age eligibility for 4K enrollment, her son had a chance to enroll in 4K the following year. However, since she felt that her son was more than ready for 4K in academics, she debated whether he could attend kindergarten right away. She shared her concerns about her son’s kindergarten readiness:

“When you have a child who kind of falls in that age range that my son did, he couldn’t be in the 4K program because of his age when he was four. And then, the following year we had a choice to either put him in a 4K program or put him into kindergarten. One of the things that I initially did was when we were deciding about 4K versus kindergarten, we saw that they were offering, I believe it was sort of like a psychological assessment or something like that to see if your child was in fact ready for the kindergarten program. And we had indicated in our paperwork that we wanted our son to go through that assessment and we thought that someone would contact us to go through that process, but no one ever contacted us and then the summer was over, and then, we’d already made the decision to just by-pass 4K and put him in the kindergarten program.

It was not that Naomi did not want to send her son to 4K. Rather, she was not sure if he was ready for kindergarten, and if not, she was considering 4K enrollment. However, because the district did not follow up with her about the assessment that would measure her son’s psychological readiness, she sent him to kindergarten by skipping 4K. What also led Naomi to
make that decision was she could not enroll her son in childcare centers due to her family’s budget constraints. For this reason, her husband, who was working from home, took care of their child’s education and care:

The thing that worried me the most was that I didn’t feel like he was able to interact with other children and so I was worried about the social and emotional aspect of his development in comparison to other kids who were in daycare or preschool Monday through Friday. And then, when we decided to send him to the summer program, I worried about whether he would adjust or adapt each week. He did. We were anticipating the little things that he experienced in kindergarten when he actually started. So, we just kind of wanted him to get that experience, even if it was just for one summer, so that it didn’t shock his system when he went to kindergarten.

To prepare her child for social-emotional and school readiness, she sent her son to a community summer school as the next best option that would meet the family’s budget and help her child’s readiness on some levels. However, looking back at her son’s kindergarten experience, she regretted her 4K decision:

He really struggled in kindergarten. We almost regretted our decision to enroll him in kindergarten versus the 4K program. So, initially, the first week or two seemed like he just really had a hard time adjusting to a full-day program, being away from home. And so, he would come home and complain that the day was too long and ask, when does school end? When does the program end? So, I know that just having a full day of structured activities where the requirements were very rigid was difficult for him to adjust. I think the other thing that we experienced is that given that he turned 5 in October, he was a lot younger than the majority of the kids in his class. So, socially, and emotionally, he was in a different place.

Because Naomi saw her son struggling to adjust to a full-day schedule and having difficulties socially and emotionally, she shared that she would make a different decision if she could have a do-over.

On the other hand, Camila—a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT—enrolled her son in the same childcare center during the 4K year because of her son’s lack of preparedness for kindergarten due to his July birthday: “He also has a July birthday, so that weighed a lot into a lot of our decisions. In the past, he was considered young in the daycare. 5
and 6 in kindergarten already, so that was a reason why we didn't end up jumping straight into kindergarten at this point.” Her son’s young age signaled that her son was not ready for kindergarten yet. She figured that her son needed more time to mature before attending kindergarten. Later in the interview, she shared that she did not regret her 4K decision because she saw a lot of growth in her son’s social-emotional and academic readiness when he entered kindergarten.

These two parents’ decisions seemed similar but were slightly different. Naomi’s no-4K decision was a result of a combination of structural constraints, uncertainty about her son’s kindergarten readiness, and budget constraints. On the other hand, Camila chose to stay in the same childcare center without having structural constraints in 4K enrollment and without uncertainty about what her son needed for his current readiness level.

**Parents’ decisions about where to send their children for 4K**

Parents who considered where to send their children during the 4K year looked at the types of learning structure and curriculum that childcare centers would provide as well as the familiarity that their children already had by having been using the same center throughout their 0-3 years.

1. **Curriculum and teaching: Parents’ beliefs and values related to quality curriculum and teaching influenced their decisions.**

   Three parents whose income levels were above the FPT decided to stay in their current childcare centers because their childcare centers’ curricula and teaching were aligned with their educational beliefs and values. In particular, they valued play-based learning, personalized projects, and a Spanish language curriculum for their children’s second language learning.
Vivian— a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— decided to stay in her current childcare center because it supported her child’s learning via personalized projects rather than sedentary learning activities. She explained her decision-making process when asked to describe a perfect 4K setting for her child:

I think the most important thing for me is the teacher and the approach they're taking. [...] I had wondered about a Montessori setup because I had a Montessori-trained teacher in my public school as a child who made a huge difference for me, particularly in being able to give personalized projects. We had certainly considered that, but none of the Montessori schools would work for us location-wise or scheduling-wise as well. Plus, we were so happy with what was going on in her 4K classroom, we just didn't try very hard to make it work. We just believed that what we were doing was going well. I think the teacher that we had in our 4K program was able to give Isa personalized projects because she's reading at least at the end of the second-grade level in kindergarten. She's very, very advanced academically in almost all areas. And so, this teacher was giving her really unique projects, and I think that was probably the most important thing, a great teacher who knew how to teach, knew how to motivate and manage discipline, and could give her things as she was ready for them so that she was continually challenged and not bored and not sitting still instead of learning.

She could have moved her child to a Montessori school if there were no logistical issues. However, she decided to stay in the same childcare center because she was satisfied with the quality of curriculum and teaching. Specifically, she believed that teachers’ teaching and instructional materials were tailored to her daughter’s needs in an engaging way.

Similarly, Maya— a Multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT— also kept her child in the same childcare for the 4K year. When making her decision, she considered whether her current childcare center would provide a play-based curriculum and not focus too much on academics. When asked to describe what she considered for her 4K decision, she shared the type of curriculum and learning she looked for:

We were really interested in a play-based type of curriculum. Some of the 4K programs are getting too academic-focused, which I don’t think is good for four-year-olds — they should be playing. So, there’s a nice mix of that program, which was also something we were interested in.
She looked for a setting that provided a play-based curriculum that she contrasted with other centers’ focus on academics. Before making her 4K decision, Maya knew that the curriculum and teaching the center had been providing aligned with her values because her child had been attending the center from 0-3 years. She shared what she liked about her non-district 4K site:

There really was very experienced staff there, really well versed in early childhood education and development. They do tons of great sensory experiences for the kids, art, and lots of great learning opportunities just through play. They’re very play-based, which we also liked. They have a huge outdoor playground at [the center], so they get to play outside, and do all kinds of outside activities a lot, which we really like.

Maya believed that play-based learning would provide her child with more sensory experiences. In fact, her preference for a play-based curriculum was closely related to her child’s sensory needs. She shared how the center’s learning environment allowed her child to work on sensory needs: “His teachers were able to work with us on some of his sensory challenges and had enough capacity in the room where they had two teachers in the room a lot of the time. I think they probably have more resources than they do at the 4K at school.” This explained why she chose her current childcare center over other options like elementary 4K. Not only did she believe that the teacher-to-child ratio of the childcare center allowed teachers enough capacity to accommodate individual children's needs, but the teachers also had more resources than elementary 4K to support her child’s sensory needs.

On top of the tailored instruction, the Spanish language curriculum at non-district 4K was another factor that drew parents whose income levels were above the FPT into deciding to stay in the same location. Vivian shared why staying at the same site was favorable: “The really wonderful teacher at [our daycare] speaks Spanish, and she spoke Spanish with a couple of native Spanish speakers in that daycare [...] I think everything about kindergarten was made better by the fact that she had that experience.” She thought the Spanish bilingual teacher at non-
district 4K helped her child to get used to Spanish language and adjust to the DLI kindergarten the following year. A similar type of preference for the Spanish language curriculum was also found in Kayla’s decision-making story. Kayla—a White mother whose income level was above the FPT—also chose to stay in her current childcare center because of the center’s Spanish curriculum. She shared why she was interested in the Spanish curriculum at her childcare center: “The school that we were enrolling our children in offered Dual Language Immersion. So, we wanted them to have that exposure to Spanish before entering kindergarten. So that’s why that was important to us.” Based on Vivian and Kayla’s accounts, Spanish language learning opportunities at non-district 4K could attract parents whose income levels were above the FPT and whose children spoke English as their first language.

2. **Continuity and stability: Parents decided to stay at their current childcare centers to continue to have familiarity and provide stability for their children and parents themselves.**

Like childcare 4K parents, no-4K parents valued the familiarity and stability that their children and parents themselves would have by staying at the same childcare center. Specifically, they believed that continuing the use of the same childcare center would provide their children and themselves with more comfort and fewer transitions.

Three mothers whose income levels were above the FPT—Maya and Camila (Multiracial, employed mothers) and Kayla (a White, employed mother)—decided to use the same childcare centers to provide their children with fewer transitions. Maya shared this reason when asked about her 4K decision: “The other factor with our son was the number of transitions in a day and for him trying to go somewhere for half a day and then transition to something else when he was four would have been pretty tough for him.” This indicates that she considered
half-day, elementary 4K; however, she felt that it would then make her child have multiple transitions during the day because she needed wrap-around care during her work hours. For this reason, full-day 4K worked the best for Maya’s family.

However, the full-day schedule was not the only thing she considered. It was the stability that was important to her child: “If the elementary 4K would have had a full-day program, that might’ve been something we considered more— sending him to the school. [...] But the stability of one more year [in the childcare center] was worth it.” Maya’s statement told us that she would still have chosen the same childcare center even if full-day elementary 4K was provided because of the stability that her child had already built with the center. She then explained why stability was prioritized for her child who had sensory needs:

He had established relationships already with the kids he was with. That was the other factor too. He had played with these kids since he was two. They’d come up through the programs together. They had a really nice group of kids. For him, that stability of the kids transitioning to the 4K room.

Having established relationships throughout the 4K year was valued because it would prevent her child from being overstimulated.

Similarly, Kayla also kept her son at the same childcare center because she felt her son’s familiarity with teachers and the center’s routine would help him have a seamless transition to a 4K classroom. However, she added one more reason when describing her decision-making process:

The one thing that made it very easy to consider was we were already familiar with the school and the teachers but also there was no-4K program at our home elementary school. So, at the time, our home elementary school, which is our in-district kindergarten, did not have a 4K program. And so, for us, the decision was very easy because he would've had to go to a whole new school --For one year and so it wasn't worth the amount of transition and so we just kept him at the same school. [...] But we would have considered it if the elementary school that he did go on to as a kindergartner would have had a 4K program.
Because 4K was not provided at her child’s kindergarten anyway, staying at the same center was the way for Kayla to provide her child with fewer transitions and more stability. For this reason, Kayla considered the number of transitions her child would have *across grade levels* in two years, whereas Maya thought about the number of transitions *during the day*. These reasons were closely related to their time-related resources and 4K supply in addition to their values related to familiarity and stability.

Continuing the use of the same center was also a benefit to parents themselves. Since these three mothers whose income levels were above the FPT were all working full-time and needed wrap-around care, they all wanted to find a full-time childcare option that could complement their limited time resources and allow them to have fewer transitions during their work hours. Yet, they needed to pay expensive tuition for the service. I discuss this more in a later section on parents’ time-related and financial resources. To briefly summarize these three parents’ decision-making, they considered how their children and parents themselves could have fewer transitions, which was for their entire family’s sanity. This indicates that they enrolled their children in full-day, non-district 4K to have a balance between parents’ and children’s needs even though they needed to pay their childcare centers expensive tuition.

I introduced parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K. Table N16 summarizes how parents made those decisions.

[Insert Table N16]

**Parents’ resources that enabled their children to access non-district 4K or alternative forms of 4K**

1. **Informational resources**: Parents gained access to 4K information in various ways, influencing their decisions.
No-4K parents used their social resources to gain information about non-district or district 4K and to decide where to send their children for the 4K year. Their information sources included their current childcare centers, friends, co-workers, childcare tours, and online websites. Parents who stayed at the same childcare centers gained information about non-district 4K from their centers’ information sessions of the center and childcare directors. They easily accessed 4K information, which made them feel their decisions were easy. However, parents who had not sent their children to childcare centers before 4K years had the opposite experience.

To begin with, two employed mothers whose income levels were above the FPT were contacted by their childcare directors when the 4K year was approaching. For example, Vivian—a White mother—shared that her childcare director suggested moving her child to a 4-year-old classroom and provided relevant information:

The childcare director talked with us about it. [...] And then they gave us -- they had a handout that talked about the way the 4K classroom worked. This is the sort of approach we take to the curriculum. These are the kinds of things you have to provide and why we do that, what we expect of the children. So that helped us understand how they were going to use the class or how they were going to work in the classroom and gave us the information we needed about what to supply. So that helped, I think.

The non-district 4K information was given to Vivian without even trying to reach out to the district or other people. For this reason, she described her decision as easy in the survey: “Your [survey] questions about 4K enrollment weren’t relevant to us since our daycare administrators handled that all for us without appointments or frustrations.” The timing of when she received the information was opportune in that she might have not known about a non-district 4K program on-site otherwise when the 4K year was approaching:

When my child was getting older, quite frankly, it hadn't occurred to me to talk to anybody about it. I sort of assumed I would look at the local elementary school, find a program, and sign her up for it. I didn't know that it would sort of be like starting kindergarten early and she would go to school, and we would figure out what to do after school as a part of that. So, I was surprised to find that Madison didn't have anything or
that they don't in most places have [4K with wrap-around care]. And certainly, our 
elementary school did not. And then, when I realized that our daycare center does 4K, 
that just made it really easy. I do think it helps that she went into 4K 6 months early.

She had been assuming that she would send her child to elementary school for 4K until the 4K 
year approached. However, when she realized that her home elementary school did not provide 
4K with wrap-around care, she learned that her current childcare center provided non-district 4K 
from the director. Her logic was, therefore, why not take it?

Similarly, Kayla— a White mother whose income level was above the FPT— also 
received non-district 4K information from her childcare director. The information that she 
received was not only about non-district 4K but also about how much her childcare center would 
prepare children for kindergarten. She explained what her childcare director shared with her 
about non-district 4K and its curriculum:

Kayla: We talked to the preschool director and then they also provided a parent 
information session where they reviewed the curriculum and the materials that they were 
going to be covering in the classroom during their 4K and also provided us with statistics 
of prior students that had gone through, about their ability to be ready for the 
kindergarten setting.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Do you mean the statistics like a score, like the Phonological 
Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) score?
Kayla: It wasn't a PALS score or anything like that. It was more just like it was basic. 
Did they know their letters? Did they know their colors? Simple tasks like that. [...] Letter 
recognition, writing of the letters and numbers. They also incorporated some Spanish 
curriculum into their day as well which we were very interested in.

The director presented the information that would inform parents’ decisions and also attract 
parents as potential customers including Kayla. This was also a good chance for Kayla to see if 
her childcare center would provide what her family was looking for in a 4K program.

Additionally, she was able to “talk directly with the classroom teacher” before making her 
decision. Interestingly, she did not use this information to weigh multiple 4K options to make her 
decision. In the survey, she shared that she considered only one option, her current childcare
center, because her child’s home elementary school did not provide 4K anyway. She shared that this made her decision much easier: “We did not choose MMSD because there was no-4K program at the school my son would attend for kindergarten. If there was, our decision would have been more challenging.” This bolsters the finding from the closed-ended survey (Table N16) that the number of 4K locations parents considered was parallel to their stress level of decision-making. The less options Kayla had, the easier her decision-making was. After all, those limited options that were already filtered through the constraints in 4K supply and her time-related resources got rid of her unnecessary stress of becoming overwhelmed to the point of inertia in front of multiple 4K options.

Contrary to Vivian and Kayla who easily gained non-district 4K information from their childcare centers, parents who kept their children at home during the 0-3 years either did not know about 4K or struggled to understand the 4K enrollment process. For example, Eleanor—an FRL-eligible, White, employed mother—did not know about free, half-day elementary 4K until her kindergarten year; yet, this did not affect her decision substantially because she kept her child at home to provide stability rather than sending her child to any types of childcare: “I did not know [that there was a half-day 4K program] at the time. [...] I know now because I see the kids at [my child]’s kindergarten. There’s 4K there and I get the newsletters that say, ‘Oh, no 4K today.’” Even though the district provided universal 4K, this example shows that 4K could not be accessible when the parent did not know about 4K.
Moreover, Naomi—a Black, employed mother whose income level was above the FPT—ended up skipping 4K and sending her child to kindergarten after her struggles to understand how the 4K enrollment process worked. She explained her struggles:

At least in our experience, we wish that we would’ve had a better understanding of how the whole process worked. [...] If we understood how that process worked a little better, we might’ve actually connected with someone to have my son evaluated, to see if he was better suited in 4K versus the kindergarten program and we could just hold him back from the kindergarten program this past year and just had him do the 4K if that would have served him better. But none of that really fully explained to us and the paperwork they provided us and the information that we received wasn’t very self-explanatory. [...] When I filled out my paperwork, I checked the box indicating that we did want him to do the assessment, but no one ever followed up with us.

Unlike parents who received information from their childcare directors with ease, Naomi experienced difficulties gaining information about 4K even though she asked the district for information. Without being better informed, she enrolled her child in kindergarten without 4K experience. As a result, she regretted her decision after she saw her child’s poor performance in kindergarten. This demonstrates that parents who used a childcare center before 4K were more likely to have privileges in gaining information about 4K. Also, these parents who did not use childcare centers before 4K year were more likely to be FRL-eligible or parents who had tight childcare budgets even though their incomes were above the FPT. I will explain this later in the section on parents’ time and financial resources.

While analyzing the data, one thing that I found puzzling was the inconsistency of how parents called their non-district 4K programs. Parents who stayed at their current childcare centers called their 4K program “not official 4K” or “certified or official 4K.” For example:

It was a smooth transition and a very successful experience, so there was really no question when the time came to start the official 4K year. – Vivian (White mother, Above the FPT)

As I explained earlier, Naomi could not enroll her child in 4K in the previous year because of the district’s age-cut-off date. The decision I explain here is her decision-making for the following year (the 2017-18 school year) when she debated whether to send her child either to 4K or kindergarten.
We considered the program he was already in at Woods Hollow which is a certified 4K and has a great reputation. (Maya, Above the FPT, Multiracial mother, survey)

We didn't do an official 4K program. We just did the preschool program through the daycare center. – Camila (Multiracial mother, Above the FPT)

When parents described the information they received from childcare centers, they shared that their directors provided information about a 4K program, curriculum, and its operation. However, it was never clear from the data whether their directors clarified that their program was not a district 4K program. This explains that parents’ decisions were not necessarily made by being fully informed.

In addition to information gained from parents’ current childcare centers, many parents whose income levels were above the FPT, regardless of their race, consulted their friends and co-workers about childcare programs, referred to websites, or had visits to childcare centers to inform their decisions. The examples below demonstrate how parents gained information through their social circles and visits to the childcare centers:

We found a few people that had gone there and had gotten good reviews on it. – Camila (Multiracial mother, Above the FPT)

[Through visits], I was trying to understand how they managed discipline, sort of what their behavioral approaches are to children, and how they're teaching them. For example, this place emphasizes learning through play, things like that. - Vivian (White mother, Above the FPT)

Based on what Camila and Vivian shared, parents tended to trust the information that they gained from their social networks and their observations. I elaborate more on this below using other parents’ decision-making stories.

Maya — a multiracial mother whose income level was above the FPT— relied on her close contacts and information on online websites to make her childcare decision for her child’s 0-3 years. Her childcare decision was directly related to her 4K decision because she “made the
decision when [her family] put [her child] at the age of 2 and knowing [her child] would be there through 4K.” She explained what information she referred to for her 4K decision:

**Maya:** It was really word of mouth. We heard enough from teachers and other parents saying that the kids that came out of that program were super well prepared for kindergarten and they think they do a really nice job with the kids there. They had a lot of fun too. [...]  
**Interviewer:** Did you search through the website as well?  
**Maya:** Initially, yes, we looked at the website. I talked to friends that I knew who had kids there. I reached out to my contacts. I talked to some people who knew people in the school and asked them what they’d heard. It’s really my connection.

The information she gained from her social circles was perceived as reliable and trustworthy, leading her to choose the site with confidence. Specifically, information from the people whose children already attended the same location was a powerful source of information. This also tells us that the information then could be different depending on parents’ social circles, indicating that information parents valued could be subjective.

Similarly, Naomi (a Black mother whose income level was above the FPT), who skipped 4K and sent her child to kindergarten when her child’s age was finally eligible for 4K, would ask people in her social circles and visit the school if she could have a do-over:

I would want to look up the experiences of my friends maybe and see how happy they are. [...] I would probably visit the sites and see what I could learn from the environment and see how they interact with the kids, what the kids do, and how happy the kids are. So, those are things that I probably would have done.

Since Naomi regretted her 4K decision that was made without being fully informed by the district, she would try different ways if she could have a do-over. She believed that other parents’ experiences and her observations would be reliable sources of information. This also demonstrates that information that she would gain through those venues would be valuable information from the users’ views rather than providers’ views like the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS).
To sum up, Maya and Naomi’s information sources indicate that the information could vary depending on the types of social circles that they belonged to and how their beliefs/values confirmed what they would see from their childcare visits. Parents considered these types of information trustworthy and reliable as if they already had a strong emotional attachment to it.

2. **Time and financial resources:** Parents’ time-related and financial resources influenced their accessibility to 4K or non-district 4K.

Since many parents were working, their wrap-around care needs were prioritized to complement their limited time resources during the day. If the household had a stay-at-home parent, a parent working from home, or family support, it was rather easy to manage their children’s childcare at home. Across these parents who used non-district 4K or had their children stay at home during the 4K year, affordability was commonly brought up as one of their significant decision-making factors. I will explain how parents' time and financial resources intricately influenced their decisions.

To begin with, Naomi, Joel, and Eleanor were able to keep their children at home during the 4K year because their partners stayed at home or their family members supported childcare. For example, Naomi — a Black mother whose income level was above the FPT— could not enroll her child in elementary 4K due to the district’s age cut-off requirement. For this reason, until her child attended kindergarten, her husband who was working from home took care of their child while she was working outside the home. However, this decision was not the result of their choice. In fact, she wanted to send her child to non-district 4K when her child could not be enrolled in district 4K. Yet, it was the cost that prevented her from opting into non-district 4K:

> It was probably not the most ideal situation for him, but when we considered the cost of daycare, it just seemed like a better option for us because my husband had the flexibility to be at home. So, for us, it was really a financial decision, but if we had the money, we probably would have definitely put him in a daycare or a pre-paid program, but because
he was born in October, we didn’t have an option to enroll him in the pre-4K program at the Madison School District, so that was never really an option for us because of his date of birth. I think that kind of did us a disservice as a family. We just didn’t have the finances to put him in daycare I mean because daycare is just outrageously priced. It was cheaper for us to keep him home.

Even though Naomi’s household’s income level was above the FPT, childcare costs could not be ignored. The free, elementary 4K program was also not accessible for Naomi’s son because of his October birthday. As a result, she was caught between a rock and a hard place because 4K and non-district 4K were not accessible at all in every way. For this reason, her husband’s flexible work hours at home became the resource for childcare. Later in the interview, she shared her childcare search experience which demonstrated how she considered childcare price and quality simultaneously:

We also looked at the quality of the different programs that were around and convenient for us. There was a Gold Learning Center. I actually visited and talked to the director. He told me that they would work with us for our financial needs. But in the end, that location was just too far away from us. [...] We looked at other programs near us to see if there were reduced-hour programs that we could send him to that would be more in our price range. While we did find some options, we just didn’t know whether we were happy with the facilities. [...] So, we just decided that it would be best to have him at home.

Although everything cannot be perfect in this world, her decision-making process shows that the quality that she was looking for could not be compromised to meet her price range.

In addition, Joel — a White father whose income level was above the FPT— and his wife decided that one person would stay at home due to childcare costs even before the 4K year. This then allowed his wife to take care of their 4K child at home while Joel was working outside the home during the day:

Looking at costs, it was kind of like, let's say you're paying $250 a week or whatever for daycare, and then let's say you make like 400 or 500 dollars a week, it's like you're almost paying more, not making as much or the money’s going right back to daycare when you could just stay home. Yes, maybe save some of the money, I guess. So yes, that was the decision to have her stay home.
This demonstrates that his family’s 4K decision was indirectly related to affordability although it was not the direct reason for not enrolling his child in 4K. However, since his wife decided to stay home, having their child at home during the 4K year worked out without any complications. For this reason, his stay-at-home wife became a valuable resource for his family. Similarly, Eleanor — an FRL-eligible White mother — was able to hold a part-time night shift job and take care of her 4K child at home during the day because her family took care of her children during her work hours. These three parents’ experiences (Naomi, Joel, and Eleanor) indicate how parents’ time and financial resources could produce privileges and disadvantages simultaneously. If parents had both limited time and financial resources, that would double their disadvantages in accessing 4K. However, if they have one of the resources available, it could be helpful to offset the disadvantages resulting from the other limited resources.

I now discuss how parents who used non-district 4K thought about their time resources and affordability when making their decisions. Many parents whose income levels were above the FPT (e.g., Camila, Vivian, and Maya) enrolled their children in non-district 4K to complement their limited time resources and cover wrap-around care needs. However, they were responsible for costly childcare tuition.

For example, Camila shared what she looked for when initially enrolling her child in the childcare center that eventually became their non-district 4K site: “We work full time, so we would like to have the ability to drop them off before work and be able to keep them in one place until we are done with work.” Similar to this, Vivian explained that her family’s schedule during the 4K year was not affected by her child’s 4K schedule because it was a full-time program anyway:

[I and my husband] would commute together. But that meant that we had to commute together in the morning, and then I would continue to my work. And at night I would
continue back. And so, it made for long days. So, our issue was having her there for a long time. Because 4K was in the same building and there were no worries about after-school care because it was all part of the same thing. We didn't have to worry about that. So, for us, that didn't change from when she was 3 or 4. It always was.

Unlike elementary 4K parents, no-4K parents who used full-time childcare did not have to go through multiple transitions during the day. Continuing the same childcare center allowed their family to have consistency in schedules. Thinking of this for the whole family, as I explained earlier, staying at the same center benefited parents and children by having fewer transitions. For this reason, full-time childcare helped families strike a balance between parents’ and their children’s needs.

Further, Maya shared that she even did not seriously explore elementary 4K options due to her wrap-around care needs. While her childcare needs were met, she later shared that it came at a price:

I didn’t research [elementary 4K options] that much ‘because there was no way that we were going to go there because it just wasn’t going to work with our schedule. So, I think having some more options around the whole day, and wrap-around care would be crucial. If people are working, that’s just not a doable schedule. They also have a lot of days off and are trying to figure out what you do with the kids on those days off. For us, daycare was just way more convenient.

Maya’s description tells us that having access to 4K that was tailored to her schedule was important. However, there was a tradeoff: the childcare cost. Maya described expensive childcare costs as her “ongoing struggle”: “[The childcare] was super expensive and that was one big negative. It was very expensive. It’s definitely an ongoing struggle. We just feel like, for the base of the rest of his learning and his life, it was worth it.” Even though her household’s income level was above the FPT, childcare costs were a burden indeed. Because her non-district 4K met both her wrap-around care needs and her child’s learning needs, she thought it was worth it. Because of generally expensive childcare costs, another parent, Camila, considered the price as
one of the prioritized factors: “I chose the childcare center mostly by location and price. After doing some investigation, we found a few people that had gone there and had gotten good reviews.” This demonstrates that the location and price were her first criteria for screening the options; then, among the options that met the first criteria, she referenced reviews of other people.

To increase access, Maya, who also considered affordability when making her decision, emphasized that it would be important for the district to have affordable, high-quality non-district programs that could be compatible with district 4K:

I think being able to have a program that can compete with the 4K programs, that are in the community, that are really good programs is a challenge with people that can’t afford them. And I don’t like that for our kids in the community that can’t afford to go to those programs. I think it already starts out with the disparity as kids are walking in the door to go to kindergarten.

Although Maya identified that she could afford expensive childcare costs, she pointed out that high-quality programs similar to district 4K could not be accessible to some people due to affordability. This then aligned with what Naomi shared previously about why she could not even send her child to a childcare center when her child could not attend 4K due to the district’s age-cut-off date: she prioritized the price of childcare, but she could not compromise on quality over price and vice versa. To recap, these three parents’ experiences (Camila, Vivian, and Maya) demonstrate that many employed parents’ wrap-around care needs were supported by non-district 4K programs; however, the costs of childcare were their responsibilities, which was one of the key factors that they considered for their decisions even though their income levels were above the FPT.

Table N17 summarizes parents’ time and financial resources that they used for their decision-making:
Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter

No-4K parents’ decisions were related to both *whether* and *where* they would like to send their children during the 4K year; also, their decisions were much more varied than in other cases. For their decisions, they considered mostly family context-dependent quality, including their ideas about readiness, curriculum (e.g., play-based learning and its environment, Montessori curriculum, and Spanish curriculum), practical features (e.g., costs, hours, and locations), continuity of experiences at same childcare centers, and unavailability of full-day 4K or 4K at their kindergarten schools. Similar to childcare 4K parents, no-4K parents did also consider structural and process quality more than elementary 4K parents. Specifically, non-district 4K users referred to the center’s accreditation, quality ratings, and teachers’ instructional quality that they were able to observe at the same site before a 4K year. No-4K parents’ accessibility to either 4K or non-district 4K depended on how much parents’ time and financial resources aligned with 4K supply — affordable and available 4K/non-district 4K— in the district.

Many different reasons made parents decide *whether* and *where* to send their children during a 4K year. To decide *whether* they would enroll their children in 4K or non-district 4K, they considered how equipped their children were with 4K and kindergarten readiness. Parents either kept their children at home or sent their children to non-district 4K when they felt that their children were ready for 4K or needed to be ready for kindergarten. Parents also used their understanding of their children’s readiness when debating whether to enroll their children in 4K or kindergarten if they could not enroll their children in 4K in the previous year. Compared to other cases, no-4K groups had diverse groups of parents including stay-at-home parents, parents
working from home, and employed parents. This made some parents’ no-4K year doable if they decided to have their children at home or send them to half-day childcare or preschool. On the one hand, employed parents’ decisions were similar to childcare 4K parents’ because they had to complement their limited time resources during the day. However, parents across class and race talked about the affordability of using non-district 4K more than any other cases. This could be a harder hit for FRL-eligible families because the finding from the closed-ended survey (Table N14) shows that FRL-eligible no-4K parents were less likely to consider 4K enrollment than any other group of parents (Table E14, C10, & H7); yet, affordability mattered to parents whose income levels were above the FPT as well. This could complement the finding (Table N14) that no-4K parents showed more of a gap by class than elementary 4K parents in terms of moderate to high-stress levels in their decision-making.

Parents’ decisions about where to send their children during a 4K year were mostly related to their values and beliefs related to curriculum, familiarity with the same center, and parents’ wrap-around care needs. These parents had access to information through their social networks and current childcare center directors. Before finalizing their decisions about where to send their children, some of them also considered whether their home elementary schools provided 4K to weigh their options. In the process of information gathering, there was an information gap between parents who had been using the childcare centers before the 4K year and parents who had not. The former group of parents was more likely to know about non-district 4K programs, which made them continue using the same site. This was the reason why many parents did not consider many 4K options; this can be also supported by closed-ended survey results that most of the parents considered less than two 4K locations (Table N14). Moreover, as Kayla shared earlier, fewer options could bring parents less stress. This
complements the finding from Table N14 because the number of 4K locations parents considered was parallel to their stress level of decision-making. However, it was questionable whether they were informed about the difference between 4K and non-district 4K.

In addition to parents’ varied notions of quality, the meaning of accessibility to no-4K parents reflected the following things: a) full-day elementary 4K or at least transportation provided for a half-day 4K with wrap-around care option, b) affordable non-district 4K options, c) availability of 4K at their children’s kindergarten schools, and d) access to 4K information. Considering parents’ notions of quality, their resources, and 4K supply, parents had to find a coordination point to send their children to affordable, high-quality 4K or non-district 4K at their preferred location at their convenient hours. If the half-day 4K continued to be provided, parents needed at least transportation that would easily connect half-day 4K with their wrap-around care. Also, depending on children’s previous childcare experiences, parents’ definition of accessibility to 4K information was different.
PART III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
Chapter 9: What Families’ Access to High-Quality Universal 4K Means in Madison

In Part II, I examined parents’ 4K decision-making processes within the four cases — elementary 4K, childcare 4K, Head Start 4K, and no-4K option. I also aimed to answer the main research question in the analysis: “How do parents in Madison interpret and use their contextual opportunities and constraints to make decisions about whether and where their children will go to 4K?” The findings have taught us how parents navigated universal 4K within the mixed-delivery system by accommodating concurrent privileges and barriers. Based on the findings from surveys and interviews, I will now summarize the findings of the four cases to see similarities and differences in parents’ decision-making across the cases. This will then help me to conceptualize the notions of quality and accessibility from the perspective of 4K parents in the current study. This will lend us insights into what families’ access to universal 4K means in Madison.

To put it simply, all 4K parents wanted to provide their children with high-quality care and education during their 4K years and find a 4K that also worked for their family as a whole. For this reason, I argue that it is necessary to understand the types of quality parents used to decide whether and where to send their children to 4K and how they accessed high-quality universal 4K that they defined by considering their resources and local 4K supply. I assert that this is an important foundational step for me to reconceptualize the notions of quality and accessibility from the bottom-up and to provide a unique contribution to the field. The reason is that the bottom-up approach has been overlooked in existing studies on PreK because quality and access were often defined by policymakers or scholars who often adopt the top-bottom approach. The top-bottom approach could have led them to not better understand what quality factors parents truly want and what might prevent them from accessing the high-quality PreK that they
define (accessibility). For this reason, my work will be a critical contribution to the field by expanding the notions of quality and addressing the issue of accessibility which is beyond the notion of access. This then can suggest how policymakers and district staff can improve PreK programming to increase PreK accessibility for families.

Across all four cases, parents prioritized family context-dependent quality which drove them to make their final decisions regardless of parents’ and children’s demographic backgrounds. However, even though they prioritized family context-dependent quality, this did not mean that they did not consider structural (e.g., ratios, teacher’s qualifications, and class size) and process quality (e.g., warm/inclusive culture and teachers’ interactions/instructional quality). Except for Head Start 4K parents, the parents in the rest of the 4K options considered those two conventional quality factors for their decisions as well. Also, childcare 4K and non-4K parents were more likely to have chances to learn about their childcare centers’ structural and process quality based on their previous experiences at the same center before a 4K year. Yet, this was not simply their main decision-making factor compared to family context-dependent quality factors. The family context-dependent quality they considered included a) their educational beliefs/values related to readiness, types of learning structure, language acquisition, and public schooling (e.g., diversity), b) availability of special education services, and c) practical features related to their childcare needs (e.g., transportation, 4K hours, 4K locations, and costs of childcare). Through these findings about quality factors that parents considered for their 4K decisions, I argue that it is necessary to consider quality as an inclusive term which embraces structural, process, and family context-dependent quality to understand families’ access to high-quality PreK holistically. The findings also suggest that providing high structural and process
quality PreK does not necessarily guarantee parents’ equitable access to PreK because those two conventional quality factors partially reflect parents’ notions of quality.

I argue that family context-dependent quality that parents cared about was closely related to their resources and 4K supply, thereby influencing their 4K accessibility. I intentionally examine accessibility in this dissertation because access that has been discussed in the existing literature is limited for understanding what enables parents to access PreK – namely, accessibility. The parents experienced both opportunities and constraints because each of their demographic and contextual factors lent them privileges and barriers concurrently. The more parents experienced barriers, the more parents experienced struggles; if their advantageous contextual factors helped them to alleviate some of their barriers, their access was relatively easier. This finding explains how parents’ equitable access to 4K played out in the mixed-delivery system. In addition, despite the 4K supply constraints inherent in the fragmented Early Childhood Education (ECE) delivery system, the parents played an agentic role in 4K access rather than choosing what was given to them. These findings from my dissertation are significant contributions to the field because existing studies did not examine how overlapping demographic factors provide parents with concurrent opportunities or challenges to accessing PreK and how parents make their children’s PreK work by navigating a wide range of opportunities and constraints in their contexts.

To answer my research question, I found that parents’ decisions about whether to enroll their children were mostly related to their family context-dependent quality factors: their children’s 4K, kindergarten, and school readiness. To begin, 4K readiness was one of the key factors for elementary and Head Start 4K parents to decide whether to enroll their children in 4K.
The following quotes from parents explained earlier in the findings chapter exemplify this consideration.

I’m not worried about academic skill-wise, really. I’m worried about social-emotional skills. With being so young, I am worried that he is a very young boy, and that we might be rushing them into school. – Samantha, Elementary 4K

By the time he was 4, he was ready to go to 4K. He was all set. He knew his ABCs from being at the daycare and being with me, and just he was always learning something, and I wanted him to be adventurous and everything. – Joanna, Head Start 4K

Additionally, no-4K parents considered their children’s 4K readiness when they decided whether their children needed to attend/repeat 4K or attend kindergarten instead without 4K experience. Their decisions varied depending on their ideas about 4K and 4K goals, as demonstrated in the following quotes initially introduced in the findings:

He wasn’t ready to be in a giant school [4K] environment. It was just for him. – Maya, Non-district 4K

There wasn't anything that seemed out of the ordinary when it came to those social interactions. – Joel, Child staying at home during 4K year

One of the things that I initially did was when we were deciding about 4K versus kindergarten, we saw that they were offering, I believe it was sort of like a psychological assessment or something like that to see if your child was in fact ready for the kindergarten program. – Naomi, Kindergarten enrollment without 4K

He also has a July birthday, so that weighed a lot into a lot of our decisions. In the past, he was considered young in the daycare. 5 and 6 in kindergarten already, so that was a reason why we didn't end up jumping straight into kindergarten at this point.
– Camila, Repeat Non-district 4K

This finding explains why some of the 28% of Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) 4K eligible children did not attend 4K during the 2016-17 school year (Pyne et al., 2017), which is a contribution of this dissertation.

Unlike elementary, Head Start, and no-4K parents, childcare 4K parents did not indicate 4K readiness as a major decision-making factor. Furthermore, elementary and no-4K parents
considered 4K readiness when their children were boys and had birthdays close to the cut-off
dates and when their families’ income levels were above the Federal Poverty Thresholds (FPT);
they also tended to perceive that their children’s social-emotional readiness was not at the level
to attend 4K due to their younger ages compared to peers. This concept of 4K readiness that I
found from this research was not discussed in the existing literature; for this reason, this finding
could provide the field with valuable insights into parents’ PreK access.

In addition, I found that parents considered kindergarten and school readiness for their
4K enrollment decisions. Kindergarten readiness was considered by parents across all cases and
closely related to their 4K goals. Generally, as the quotes below demonstrate, beliefs/values
related to academic readiness for kindergarten were emphasized by Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)-
eligible parents of color in elementary and Head Start 4K:

De hecho, la escuela me parece un proyecto a largo plazo para todos los niños, es decir, es lo mejor que puede haber. Entonces, tenía metas académicas para Daniel en el programa de 4 años. Quería saber si el programa de 4 años cumplió con las metas que tenía para Daniel. [School seems to me like a long-term project for all children, that is, it is the best there can be. So, it had academic goals for Daniel in the 4-year program. I wanted to know if the 4-year program met those goals that I had for Daniel.] –Raquel (Elementary 4K, FRL-eligible)

Getting him kind of the academic focus, getting him started in that school trumped the inconvenience of the schedule. I think maybe for two seconds, we thought of how we would do it with my grandparents, but it just wouldn’t work. –Amber (Elementary 4K, FRL-eligible)

I wanted a 4K program that would incorporate some academics into their play-based curriculum such that my child is developing the necessary academic skills along with important social skills. –Tasha (Head Start 4K, FRL-eligible)

However, childcare and non-district 4K parents’ values related to kindergarten readiness
did not indicate substantial differences by class. Moreover, school readiness was considered
mostly by childcare and non-district 4K parents in their decisions about whether to enroll their children in 4K. They enrolled their children in childcare 4K or non-district 4K to let them learn
about the rules and expectations required in a group setting, demonstrated in the following parent contributions from the findings:

We value her ability to navigate social situations appropriately and learn how to exist in a busy, fast-moving classroom environment over being able to read when she entered kindergarten. –Xara, Non-district 4K

I guess at least the 4K is getting it started so she wouldn't be in shock when she goes to kindergarten and suddenly the teacher asks her students not to do that, be quiet, and all those things. –Caitlyn, Childcare 4K

On the other hand, elementary 4K parents’ beliefs/values related to school readiness influenced their decisions about where to send their children for 4K because their notions of school readiness were location-specific (e.g., familiarizing themselves with the school buildings, people, and expectations). In fact, some childcare and non-district 4K parents also wanted to enroll their children in elementary 4K for the same reason as Elsa, quoted below.

I think we would have preferred for him to have been able to go to Lexus Elementary to be at the same school that he would then progress into, but it just wasn't an option for us. If I'm describing a perfect setting, that would be it. Because then he would have gone into kindergarten with some built-in friendships, knowing the building, and knowing some of the familiar faces. –Elsa, Elementary 4K

However, the unavailability of 4K at K-12 schools and parents’ wrap-around care needs prevented them from choosing elementary 4K over their current childcare centers or preschools.

To summarize, 4K parents perceived universal 4K as places where their children could attend either with 4K readiness already or to develop kindergarten and school readiness. This indicates that age eligibility is not the sole factor for parents to make decisions. This current research provides significant contributions to the existing studies because it demonstrates how parents’ perspectives on readiness influence their PreK decisions and views on different PreK options by considering all demographic factors. This has not been examined in existing studies.
Moreover, parents’ decisions about where to send their children for 4K were mostly influenced by family context-dependent qualities: their values/beliefs related to types of learning structure and language acquisition, special education services, public schooling (e.g., diversity), and practical features. Their decisions about where to send their children mostly demonstrate how their preferences, resources, and 4K supply were considered; since I find that resources and 4K supply are the driving actors that allow parents to access 4K, the findings related to where they sent their children for 4K explain their accessibility.

First, parents considered where their children would best develop their readiness. This was conveyed through their preferences for structured, semi-structured, and unstructured environments. These were often described as “academic vs social-emotional focus,” “learning vs play,” “elementary school vs childcare,” and “schedules vs non-schedules.” Structured and semi-structured environments were valued by elementary 4K parents, as can be seen below:

I didn’t want him to be in preschool another year because it’s not as structured. Yes, they were doing letters and some of that stuff, but for the most part, it’s free play and I didn’t want him to be held back, but I felt like he had the emotional capacity to be in a school setting. –Amber (Elementary 4K, FRL-eligible)

Me gusta [4K elemental] porque [...] el programa tiene más estructura. Obtienen su tiempo determinado, tienen un calendario que deben hacer y tienen un horario que deben seguir, a diferencia de Head Start. [I like [elementary 4K] because [...] the program has more of a structure. They get their certain time, they have a calendar they need to do, and they have a schedule they need to follow, unlike Head Start.] –Raquel (Elementary 4K, FRL-eligible)

If it would have had to be immediately all structure, I think that would have been really challenging for him [who doesn’t have previous childcare experience]. So, I liked that the teachers had their home-type rugs, and they did a lot of things that you just kind of do at home, more informal. –Grace (Elementary 4K, Above the FPT)

I think there was a certain amount of routine and structure built into his day, but there was certainly lots of time for play and imagination, outside for recess, and inside was sort of some free time, which was really, really great for him. –Elsa (Elementary 4K, Above the FPT)
As these quotes indicated, children’s previous childcare experiences and parents’ values about academic/social-emotional learning were closely related to their preferences for certain types of learning environments. Academic readiness and a structured learning environment were mostly considered by FRL-eligible parents of color in the elementary 4K case.

On the other hand, semi-structured and unstructured learning environments were valued by childcare 4K and non-district 4K parents. Most of them hoped their children would develop social-emotional or both social-emotional and academic readiness at their sites. These parents often had opportunities to learn about whether their children’s centers provided the structure they wanted before 4K enrollment because they had been using the same center from 0-3 years.

For us, we are not really interested in getting her into a study mode really early on. As parents, we want her to enjoy herself through play as much as possible. That also lets us favor a daycare setting rather than a school setting. –Caitlyn, Childcare 4K

We were really interested in a play-based type of curriculum. Some of the 4K programs are getting too academic-focused, which I don’t think is good for four-year-olds—they should be playing. So, there’s a nice mix of that program, which was also something we were interested in. –Maya, Non-district 4K

Finally, Head Start 4K parents did not indicate the type of learning structure as a decision-making factor.

Altogether, I found that parents navigated the tensions between the two different ECE philosophies during their decision-making processes. They linked their understandings of play and learning to the types of learning structure their children’s learning could be best supported and the 4K options that would have their preferred structure. This then influenced their decisions about 4K. Specifically, elementary 4K parents were more likely to prefer academic learning and a structured learning environment than childcare and no-4K parents. In addition, FRL-eligible parents of color were more likely to prefer the structured 4K environment. This finding provides a partial answer to Pyne et al. (2017)’s finding: students of color were less likely than white
students to attend elementary 4K, while FRL-eligible students were more likely than students with household incomes above the FPT. Moreover, my findings about the relationships between parents’ perceived ECE tensions and their 4K decisions are significant contributions to the field because none of the scholars examined how parents navigate these tensions while making their PreK decisions in the mixed-delivery ECE system.

Also, parents who considered their children’s language learning for their decisions were most likely to enroll their children in elementary 4K. One reason was that elementary 4K had Spanish bilingual programs and Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs in kindergarten. This led Spanish bilingual families to enroll their children in bilingual programs to strengthen their family’s heritage. For example, Grace, whose son speaks Spanish as his first language, enrolled him in the Spanish bilingual program at elementary 4K: “We chose Gilbert Elementary because we speak Spanish at home. Our boys both went to Spanish-only-4K and then to DLI for kindergarten.” On the other hand, parents whose children spoke English as their first language enrolled their children in 4K, which provided DLI programs the following year. Alice, whose child speaks English as a first language, shared:

[Albertson elementary school] was a good segue into her experience in Cervantes Escuela [...] I mean the dual-language opportunity, that’s what’s going to keep us here in Madison. We had talked about moving back to North Carolina, but it’s too spectacular of an opportunity to walk away from. I really think it’s the reason we will continue to live here. –Alice, Elementary 4K

Parents like Alice wanted to support their children’s second language acquisition to equip their children with better cultural assets. Alice continued,

Spanish is becoming such a dominant language in this country and all over the world that we felt like it would prepare them well career-wise in getting into school. [...] We thought that that would prepare them really well, and we also just feel like it would kind of broaden their mindset and their perspective on the world. I mean, we’re like a pretty typical middle-class, white family, but we want these kids to know that that’s not the experience of everybody. –Alice, Elementary 4K
Interestingly, Spanish-and non-Spanish-speaking families wanted the opposite things from the district bilingual and DLI programs. That is, Spanish bilingual families hoped to have more Spanish-speaking students and fewer English-speaking students in the classroom so that their children could practice their home language at school. For example, Grace was not happy about 50/50 DLI, which was different from their bilingual 4K experience:

Henry had such a nice group in 4K, all native Spanish speakers, but they weren’t together. The teacher said it’s because they had so few Spanish speakers, they had to parse them out. Because there were so many native English speakers enrolled, and so they needed native Spanish speakers in each class to make it work. —Grace, Elementary 4K

However, non-Spanish-speaking families hoped to have more Spanish students or classrooms so that their children could take advantage of the district language programs. Alice whose child attended elementary 4K shared, “We knew that they would be in a classroom that had 50% native Spanish speakers and 50% native English speakers. So, there’s that built-in diversity of experience that we thought would be really beneficial for them.” Grace and Alice’s stories let us pose two questions, “For whom are the bilingual programs provided?” and “Whose interest is better served?” The MMSD website mentioned the purpose of DLI programs as,

Spanish-speaking children serve as both teachers and learners in the classroom and their cultural-linguistic heritage is seen as an asset! English-speaking families have the amazing opportunity to provide their children with a Spanish-language immersion program and cross-cultural exchange. (Madison Metropolitan School District, n.d.d)

The description indicates that both Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers would benefit each other through the DLI program. However, Grace implied that the district considered Spanish-bilingual children only to serve English-speaking children, preventing Spanish-bilingual children from strengthening their linguistic heritage. Other than elementary 4K parents, few childcare 4K and non-district 4K parents considered their centers’ Spanish curriculum or Spanish
bilingual teachers for their 4K decisions so that their children could learn the language without enrolling their children in district bilingual programs.

Language programs at elementary schools did not affect the decisions of Asian families who speak Hmong, Chinese, and Nepali about where to send their children for 4K because bilingual 4K programs for those languages are not provided in the district anyway. This indicates the exclusion of a particular group of children. This type of district language programming implicitly delivers the message about the power of a particular language: “What languages are valued?,” “Who defines the types of languages valued?,” and “Who is benefiting from the district language program the most?”

Moreover, parents’ beliefs/values related to diversity were often brought up as one of elementary 4K parents’ decision-making factors. White parents valued diversity because it would help their children’s cultural assets as Alice shared earlier and again below. Their notions of diversity meant a quantifiable diverse population.

I toured it, but there was a lot more diversity at Francesca Elementary school, which was important to us. [...] I'm really happy she met as many different kids from different parts of the city as she did. I think 4K at Molly Nursery, I’m sure they’re really good, but it’s all more affluent families, affluent white families mostly. –Alice, White mother, Elementary 4K

However, parents of color considered whether their elementary schools provided culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-bias education in addition to the diverse population. These parents of color looked for a particular district and school because of their race, as Tammy demonstrates below:

Part of why I chose the 4K because she could have gone anywhere, is because, with my experiences with the school, I know that the principal has put into her school being culturally competent, having a huge emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and what that means, recognizing that students in the school district are the majority of kids of color. [...] I want them to feel that education is valued. I want them to have teachers who promote that with them and value them as individuals with their own perspective and
identities. [...] I definitely make decisions based on where I feel my children are going to have the best opportunity to learn with people who are going to treat them fairly. – Tammy, Black mother, Elementary 4K

Based on Tammy’s description, she believed diversity was embedded in curriculum and teaching, playing a role as a hidden curriculum. Diversity was not merely the number of diverse students. As I described in Part II, these parents of color interviewed principals, did tours, and/or made sure the school’s approach towards diversity was aligned with their perspectives.

My findings about parents’ values related to language learning and diversity provide valuable insights into parents’ PreK access, which was not examined in the existing literature. Since parents across all demographic factors participated in the current study, I was able to find how parents across race, language, and class used their ideas about language learning and diversity when deciding which 4K site they would opt into. These findings contribute to the field by demonstrating equity issues resulting from language and diversity ideology as well as parents’ resources and district 4K supply that enable them to access their preferred PreK.

Availability of services was the priority for parents of children with special needs. These parents were more likely to enroll their children in elementary 4K; however, parents in other 4K sites also looked for the availability of services for their 4K decisions. They were willing to spend their time-related and financial resources if their children could use the service. For this reason, these parents’ decisions were related to where the service was provided. Moreover, many parents had been using 3K for special education services in the public school system. This led them to continue the service within the system. This can be why many children with special needs were enrolled in elementary 4K than any other 4K sites. We saw these considerations in the quotes shared in the findings section, some of which are included again here:

From phonology school, we were already associated with speech pathologists in the district. I think that we had more readily available information than maybe other first-
time 4K parents. In combination with daycare, it was all over it, like, “Hey, 4K enrollment is now. –Nora, Elementary 4K

Easton had an IEP, Individualized Education Program, because he had a stutter, a disfluency. So that's another thing about our daycare. They were very good about getting a speech pathologist/speech therapist over to work with him during 4K. –Eliana, Childcare 4K

Many of these parents are employed, meaning that they had to work during the day. For their children’s special needs, they were willing to transport their children from half-day 4K to wrap-around care or have multiple transitions to make their children’s special education service work. Based on this finding, I argue that parents navigated both opportunities and challenges to meet both their childcare needs and child’s educational needs in PreK access. This finding provides important insights into the existing literature because how parents navigate their childcare needs and their children’s educational needs has not been examined; especially, this research is the first study that informs what families of children with special needs look for and what enables them to access PreK.

In addition, parents had to consider multiple practical features that were closely related to their resources and 4K supply in their local areas when making decisions about where to send their children to 4K. Practical features included 4K hours, childcare costs, and transportation. Parents’ decisions were split in two: 1) Some parents were willing to allocate their time and financial resources to fit into the half-day 4K schedule so that their children’s educational needs were met; in this case, many parents instead struggled to meet their wrap-around care needs; 2) Other parents wanted a 4K option that would give their families fewer transitions and more stability; in this case, parents' and children’s needs were met at least halfway. As you can already tell, parents in the first category were more likely to select elementary 4K, whereas parents in the second group were more likely to select childcare 4K or no-4K.
Parents’ 4K access was all about how to balance their own needs with their children’s. If elementary 4K parents did not have enough time-related resources during the day, they had to use their financial resources to cover their wrap-around care and transportation if the district bus was unavailable. If they had additional family members and/or stay-at-home parents in their household, that offset their time-related and financial constraints. Some of them, therefore, had an option to keep their children at home without 4K enrollment; this finding provides a partial answer to Pyne et al. (2017)’s finding that 28% of the MMSD 4K eligible children were not enrolled in 4K. Others were able to consider elementary 4K due to additional family members who have time flexibility in their households. In the case of childcare and no-district 4K parents, they also had to use their financial resources to cover their limited time-related resources during the day. However, they did not have to worry about transportation and multiple transitions during the day, unlike elementary 4K parents. Finally, Head Start 4K parents did not share struggles as much as parents in other cases. Based on findings, the reasons could be that they either had part-time jobs or relied on their family members, allowing them to cover their wrap-around care needs.

Because childcare centers are expensive, parents had to think about affordability to cover their childcare needs. Many elementary 4K parents across class handled this matter by hiring a nanny or using home daycare, whereas childcare and non-district 4K parents had to pay steep tuition unless they were subsidized. Some of no-4K parents could not or decided not to send their children to any center-based centers due to their limited budgets or cost-benefit analysis on free but half-day elementary 4K; this is a partial reason that 28% of the MMSD 4K eligible families opted out of 4K in Pyne et al., (2017)’s study. Head Start 4K parents either had alternative work
schedules with their partners or paid their family members for wrap-around care after the 4K hours.

This finding about parents’ balance-seeking between their care and education needs exemplifies the issues of accessibility to PreK. As I explained in the literature review, PreK rests on the intersection between the ECE and K-12. However, how this intersection influences parents’ PreK access has not been examined in the existing studies on PreK access, except for Johnson et al. (2017) and Barbarin et al.’s (2006) study that focused on financially under-resourced employed parents’ PreK decisions. This research fills the gap in the existing literature by providing how parents’ employment across all class affect different types of PreK access in the mixed-delivery ECE system and by demonstrating how parents strive to meet their care and education needs in PreK access. In addition, my research demonstrates how parents get to their final decision by considering their childcare and education needs; examination of these parental decision-making processes lacks in the existing studies. Therefore, this study contributes to the field by showing parents’ thought processes behind the decision-making scene.

To summarize parents’ decisions about where to send their children for 4K, their access to universal 4K was not simple because they had to find a particular 4K that met their children’s educational needs and their practical needs. Each factor that influenced their decisions was interconnected with each other in that parents had to negotiate whether they were willing to compromise on one for the other and think about what they would gain and lose. Even though the district provided universal 4K, families’ resources and 4K supply made it difficult for them to access 4K.

Lastly, parents across all cases considered a small number of 4K locations. The reasons can vary. Contextual factors that I described earlier limited options for parents in the end. The
types of information sources they used might have made them consider a few options that were already filtered through the lens of their social networks or their locations. Having a smaller number of locations to consider gave them less stress.

All parents referenced information gained from their social networks. However, there were some differences across cases as well. Childcare 4K and non-district 4K parents described that 4K information was given by their current childcare centers or preschools, helping them decide to stay at their current childcare centers or preschools and remain in their current status for stability unless there were red flags about sites. Elementary 4K parents additionally relied on their locational resources (e.g., neighborhood schools) and their older children’s experiences at the same school. It follows that parents’ access to universal 4K could be easier when they belonged to social groups, 4K communities, and residential areas where 4K was available. This then led them to access a particular 4K option that aligned with the social norms of their community even though all 4K options were available. To summarize, the number of 4K locations parents considered and the information they used demonstrate parents’ decision-making processes. This is an important contribution to the field because it shows that the quantity of PreK sites in local areas is not the only factor that would increase PreK access; existing studies have paid limited attention to this.

Parents’ accessibility depended on their resources and 4K supply. In other words, they had to figure out how compatible their resources and 4K supply were to access the 4K that they preferred. I argue that parents had to find a coordination point among their time-related resources, financial resources, 4K supply including transportation, and their educational values/beliefs. Parents’ coordination points vary depending on their families’ contexts. For this reason, the meanings of universal 4K accessibility to parents across all cases were the following:
a) provision of affordable, full-day 4K or at least transportation that easily connects two different arrangements, b) availability of 4K at their home elementary schools, c) availability of language programs and special education services, and d) access to information. To put it simply, parents needed options that reflected their education values and were affordable and had convenient hours and location. If 4K was half-day, parents needed at least transportation to connect their 4K to their wrap-around care locations. This indicates that parents’ 4K accessibility was about finding the coordination point to balance their care and education needs as well as to connect different places. Lastly, how parents accessed information was also related to their 4K access. Since many parents relied on their locational and social resources, their 4K accessibility was related to which community they belonged to.

Overall, the findings suggest that the meaning of quality and accessibility to 4K parents in MMSD was complex. I assert that families’ notions of quality were value-laden and reflected their care and education needs. To access 4K, I argue that they needed to find a coordination point to balance their care and education needs.
Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

I have invited you to the complex interwoven webs of 4K parents’ decision-making processes. Part I provided you with contextual information related to PreK parents’ access to high-quality programs and the methodology/methods of the study. Part II demonstrated 4K parents’ decision-making in the four cases —elementary 4K, childcare 4K, Head Start 4K, and no-4K —by employing a comparative case study. Chapter 9 in Part III articulated what quality and accessibility mean to 4K parents in Madison, Wisconsin and how each finding contributes to the field. Now, in chapter 10, I will demonstrate how the overall findings of the current study contribute to the field and reveal suggestions for the Madison district. The suggestions may be relevant for other PreK programs provided in a mixed-delivery system as well.

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) took a Community Approach that unites different types of 4K sites to provide parents with more options. Parents were expected to choose the option that would best meet their needs. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) (n.d.g)\(^64\) stated the purpose of the Community Approach:

> Early childhood advocates consider the community approach (CA) the most logical, effective way to provide universal four-year-old Kindergarten (4K). 4KCA relies on a comprehensive public-private partnership effort, sometimes called a “school-community interface.” Working together, a broad range of local early childhood players — as many as possible— forge a common approach to a common goal: the emotional, educational, societal, and physical well-being of children. Education and care are seen as two sides of the same coin.

As the DPI states, the 4K Community Approach was designed to bring care and education components together through “a comprehensive public-private partnership effort.” It indeed provided more options to some parents in the current study because of their time and financial flexibility. However, despite the DPI’s good intentions, many 4K parents in the MMSD

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\(^64\) [https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood/kind/4k/4kca](https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood/kind/4k/4kca)
struggled to navigate the universal 4K provided in the fragmented delivery system because a lot of efforts were needed to meet both their care and education needs. This is the reason that the qualitative, comparative case study I employed provides valuable contributions to the field because it shows how parents make decisions about different 4K options or no-4K in the mixed-delivery system and what opportunities and struggles they experience during the decision-making process to access each 4K option. Since this methodological approach was not taken in most of the PreK decision-making literature, it provides a significant contribution to the field by demonstrating quality and accessibility issues in the mixed delivery PreK system in some states.

Parents’ 4K decision-making in this comparative case study exemplified the position of 4K in the fragmented, mixed-delivery Early Childhood Education (ECE) system. As many employed parents considered their children’s educational needs and wrap-around care needs, they expected 4K to meet both of them. In short, 4K was expected to serve care and education needs. This aligns with other scholars’ arguments that the boundaries between the ECE and K-12 systems have been blurred with an increase in women’s employment rates and growing emphasis on closing the opportunity gap (Glynn et al., May 8, 2013; Morrissey, February 18, 2020).

However, as Barnett et al. (2009) state, many part-day, elementary PreK focused on children’s education and development rather than reflecting parents’ wrap-around care needs, and so did elementary 4K in the MMSD. For this reason, the 4K parents in the current study preferred the option that had family context-dependent quality in addition to structural and process quality because many of them worked during the day and wanted to select 4K that aligned with their educational values/beliefs and met their children’s needs. Therefore, I argue that it was the family context-dependent quality that connected care and education needs. Because existing studies on PreK decision-making examined financially under-resourced, employed parents’
enrollment decisions (Johnson et al., 2017; Barbarin et al., 2006), my dissertation fills a gap in the existing studies by demonstrating how parents’ employment across all classes affected their 4K access.

Figure 1 shows you how I conceptualize quality and accessibility based on my analysis. This is my significant contribution to the field especially because this is the first study that examines and conceptualizes the quality and accessibility of PreK in the mixed-delivery ECE system. In the current study, parents looked for an option that aligned with their family’s life context and related to their childcare needs (e.g., affordability, schedules/time, 4K locations, and transportation); this is reflected in area A in Figure 1. The parents also considered their educational values and beliefs (e.g., language learning, learning structure, and readiness), children’s special needs, and continuity of children’s learning experiences in addition to structural and process quality for their children; this is reflected in area B in Figure 1. The areas A and B together explain parents’ notions of quality; this includes structural, process, and family context-dependent quality. The issue with accessibility to universal 4K in this current study was how to connect these two areas A and B. This connection issue may have resulted from the tensions between the ECE and the K-12 system. A mixed-delivery ECE system does provide parents with multiple options, but it also has parents sit in the driver's seat to navigate those tensions themselves when making 4K decisions (Reid et al., 2019; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). When we figure out how to connect these parents’ care and education needs (Areas A and B), parents’ 4K accessibility can be greatly enhanced. Connecting areas A and B can be done when we understand how families mobilize their resources (e.g., time, money, location, and transportation) to have a balance between their care and education needs and when we
understand how their resources match 4K supply (e.g., hours, cost, location, and transportation); this is reflected in area C of Figure 1.

Furthermore, connecting areas A and B can be done when we add family context-dependent quality as an additional component of 4K quality to structural and process quality because it will enable care and education to co-exist. Although many scholars have looked at how structural and process quality improvement can enhance families’ childcare access (Herbst, 2018; Bassok et al., 2019) and children’s outcomes (Burchinal, 2018; Pianta et al., 2016), the parents in this study cared about other quality factors as well — namely, family context-dependent quality. It was the family context-dependent quality that significantly influenced parents’ 4K decision-making.

**Figure 1. Parents’ accessibility to high-quality, universal 4K in the mixed-delivery Early Childhood Education system**
In addition, I found that 4K parents’ decision-making in the current study was under the influence of neoliberalism in society. According to Apple (2000), “[For neoliberals…], the world is intensely competitive economically, and students—as future workers—must be given the requisite skills and dispositions to compete efficiently and effectively” (p.60). This was found when parents considered the extent to which their children should be ready for 4K and kindergarten to avoid falling behind. This neoliberal view was also found when parents considered their children’s second language acquisition for their 4K and kindergarten decisions; they believed that second language acquisition would equip their children with linguistic and cultural assets to better compete with others in the globalized world. In addition, neoliberalism was also represented in the expectations of parents to be consumers who had multiple choices with regard to 4K. This was partially because 4K was provided in a Community Approach where public and private sectors came together to provide 4K. Apple (2000)’s explanation will help us to understand how neoliberalism was embedded in the scene of 4K parents’ decision-making:

The idea of the “consumer” is crucial here. For neoliberals, the world in essence is a vast supermarket. “Consumer choice” is the guarantor of democracy. […] For just as in real life, there are individuals who indeed can go into supermarkets and choose among a vast array of similar or diverse products. And there are those who can only engage in what can best be called “postmodern” consumption. They stand outside the supermarket and can only consume the image (p. 60).

Although the MMSD allows parents to choose 4K among multiple options, the baseline of those options was different. For example, elementary 4K was provided for free but operated on a half-day schedule. Many childcare 4K and non-district 4K locations were mostly fee-based and operated full-day schedules while there were some free, half-day programs as well. Head Start 4K was provided free and operated both a half-day and full-day schedule. Even though there were various 4K options, parents had to calibrate cost and time resources because each 4K option had different packets. The components in the packets were not often compatible with parents’
resources. For this reason, parents who had greater time and financial flexibility were more likely to access 4K with fewer struggles. On the other hand, some no-4K parents had to “stand outside the supermarket and [...] only consume the image” of 4K due to expensive childcare costs. For example, as discussed in the finding section, Cameron who opted out of 4K said:

For us, it was really a financial decision, but if we had the money, we probably would have definitely put him in a daycare or a prepaid program, but because he was born in October, we didn’t have an option to enroll him in the pre-4K program at the Madison School District. [...] We just didn’t have the finances to put him in daycare, I mean, because daycare is just outrageously priced. It was cheaper for us to keep him home.

For these reasons, I argue that the parents’ 4K decisions were situated within the context of neoliberalism (Figure 1). 4K in the mixed-delivery system reinforced the idea of neoliberalism because parents with more time and financial resources were able to use free elementary 4K or afford childcare/non-district 4K.

This study makes several contributions to the field. Family context-dependent quality has not been considered a major quality in the field of early childhood education. For this reason, this study contributes to the field by expanding the notions of quality and adding family context-dependent quality factors that parents cared about to the conventional quality factors that policy makers typically discuss for PreK programming. Furthermore, although multifaceted quality components that reflect families’ life circumstances and cultural values were studied previously (Grogan, 2012; Ansari et al., 2018; Barbarin et al., 2006; Bassok et al., 2018a), scholars have not examined how parents access PreK in the mixed-delivery system, across all race, class, and gender of parents, across all children’s needs, and qualitatively. The current study addresses all three of these components by qualitatively examining how parents across all 4K locations made their 4K decisions across race, class, and gender of parents and children’s needs. Moreover, quality factors that no-4K parents considered are a significant contribution to the field because
current PreK decision-making studies have not examined them. Also, many PreK studies have focused on PreK effectiveness to close the achievement gap based on children’s cognitive outcomes (McCormick et al., 2021; Ansari et al., 2021; Atteberry et al., 2019). For this reason, this study can also contribute to the field by demonstrating what might have prevented children from closing the opportunity gap. In addition, my dissertation is the first study that suggests an inclusive notion of accessibility and coordination point for parents’ PreK access. This contributes to the field (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021) by demonstrating how 4K parents find a coordination point among their preferences for quality, resources, and 4K supply.

I found that 4K parents’ decision-making in the current study reflected the issues in early childhood education and care. First, 4K parents used their understanding of their children’s readiness to make their decisions. Aligning with the previous studies on readiness from the perspective of a nativist (Greenburg & Winsler, 2020; Hanly et al., 2019; Graue et al., 2002), 4K parents in the current study applied the logic of the gift of time to their 4K decision-making. That is, elementary and non-district 4K parents considered delaying their children’s 4K/kindergarten entry because they perceived that their children were immature. They believed securing time could help their children mature because immaturity resulted from their children’s birthdays being right before or after the cut-off dates. These parents were more likely to have incomes above the Federal Poverty Thresholds (FPT), have boys, and perceive that their children had underdeveloped social-emotional skills; this finding aligns with existing studies (Graue et al., 2002; Greenburg & Winsler, 2020; Mergler & Walker, 2017). However, while the existing studies on readiness discussed kindergarten readiness, this study is the first study that investigated parents’ consideration of 4K readiness. In addition to 4K readiness, I found that 4K parents’ notions of kindergarten and school readiness were related to empiricists’ views. That is,
4K parents in the current study believed that readiness can be developed through teacher and school support, which aligns with the views of existing studies (Meisels, 1999; Brinkley et al., 2022; Sonnenschein et al., 2016). Yet, existing studies have not examined how parents plan for their children’s educational trajectories including PreK enrollment in relation to their understanding of kindergarten and school readiness. For this reason, this current study contributes to the field by demonstrating how parents’ understanding of kindergarten and school readiness is related to their children’s childcare, PreK, and kindergarten experiences.

I also found how 4K parents perceived the tensions between the ECE and K-12 when they made their decisions. They implied their perceived tensions when they indicated their preferences for play or learning. This then influenced their decisions about 4K locations. A few of studies have looked at parents’ beliefs about play, but none of the literature on PreK decision-making has examined how parents used their perceptions of the tensions for their PreK decisions. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute to the field by demonstrating how parents’ perceptions about those tensions could affect their 4K access.

In the current study, I demonstrated parents’ 4K search processes in each case, such as the number of 4K locations they considered, their level of stress in decision-making, the information parents used, and how they ruled out options to make a final decision. I found that 4K parents generally considered a small number of 4K locations which could also be parallel to their stress level. Their beliefs/values, resources, 4K supply, and information gained through their social networks and neighborhoods could provide them with a limited number of options to consider. These findings about the 4K parents’ search process are important contributions to the field because existing studies have paid little attention to how parents sort into different PreK types, except for Bassok et al. (2018a).
Finally, my study points to important suggestions for the MMSD that may also be relevant for mixed-delivery PreK programming nationwide to increase parents’ equitable access to high-quality 4K. First of all, providing affordable full-day program options would be the key for the district's parents to access 4K. Parents shared that they had to pay full tuition even if they only used wrap-around care at childcare centers or that they hoped elementary 4K would provide full-day schedules. I acknowledge that this is difficult to untangle because it has been sustained for a long time in the ecology of ECE. Therefore, I also suggest the MMSD better utilize the existing infrastructure, buildings, and people of each 4K location. For example, if 4K hours vary in each 4K location, district transportation could be arranged for parents with reasonable restrictions on distance. Parents brought up that transportation was not provided if their wrap-around care was far or if the pick-up and drop-off locations did not correspond. When the MMSD better utilizes existing infrastructure through the public-private partnership, parents will have more options to choose from to meet their needs. Also, considering that parents referenced information circulated in their social circles or gained from their neighborhoods or their first-hand experiences with the 4K site, holding social gatherings would be helpful for some families to mingle and exchange information. This can be accompanied by the district's information session as well. Since some families gained information from the flyers at community programs or local areas they frequented, formal or informal information sessions in families’ local areas would also help some families access 4K information. These suggestions would apply to PreK programming, especially in other states that provide PreK in the mixed-delivery system.

Limitations

I acknowledge that this study has limitations, which can be addressed through future studies. Since the study population was more likely to be White whose income levels were above
the FPT, the findings I presented may be limited in understanding underserved or minoritized families’ decision-making. However, I addressed this issue by including more underserved and under-resourced families in the subgroup analysis to examine the topic of the research in-depth. This allowed me to understand families’ consideration of their race, language, and class in 4K decision-making. In addition, future studies can build upon this current study by incorporating more Head Start 4K parents. The number of Head Start 4K parents was smaller than the parents of other cases. This could have lent me limited views on Head Start 4K parents’ decision-making. I tried to address this issue by examining survey and interview data to understand their decision-making holistically and in-depth.
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## APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of survey and interview samples by 4K program type (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Respondents (N=556)</th>
<th>Interview Participants (N=51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; High school</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/More</td>
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<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Status</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch eligible</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Needs</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>122</td>
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Table E1. Descriptive statistics (%) of elementary 4K parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree or equivalent</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or technical school</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or more</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table E2. Descriptive statistics (%) of elementary 4K parents’ childcare arrangements and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare experience during 0-3 years</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home with a parent/guardian</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home with a relative/non-relative</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside home with others(^{65})</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family daycare</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care center</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s kindergarten entrance age range</td>
<td>5.03-6.24</td>
<td>5.01-6.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{65}\) Others include a family member, friend, or neighbor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural quality</td>
<td>I am a teacher that works directly for the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) and thus when choosing a 4K site, I felt it was more important to choose a school-based site as opposed to a daycare to ensure my son’s teachers were adequately licensed.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4K is a more school-like environment than her preschool. She was ready to learn how to make her way in a larger classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process quality</td>
<td>My child has more difficult behavior than typical children at times. I was worried about getting a teacher that would be patient with him and work well with him.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From reading primary research and paying attention to my kid’s needs and other kids’, I see that learning how to pay and be a kind, curious, empathetic, and resourceful kid is more important than any academics at this age. The academics will follow if there is a solid base of being allowed to be curiously engaged with the world. Having caring teachers and other grown-ups who can model empathy, being present, concentration, discipline, etc. is what rises to the top in early childhood education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E4. Parents’ ideas about 4K readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4K readiness</td>
<td>Whether to send</td>
<td>Regarding all of these skills [(social-emotional skills, academics, motor skills, and school readiness)], if our son's proficiency wasn't on par with his age group, we would have considered waiting for him to mature and develop those skills at home until kindergarten was the right choice for our son.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where to send</td>
<td>My two children were in private preschool two days a week for the two years before they started 4K. Because they had the skills listed above [(social-emotional and school readiness skills)], I thought they should go to public 4K rather than the private preschool's 4K program.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E5. Parents’ ideas about kindergarten readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten readiness</td>
<td>Academic readiness</td>
<td>My daughter's primary childcare provider was my mother. I knew that there were many things my child could learn from her but I knew that she would not be able to teach her academically as my mother struggled with the English language at times and was very limited in her own academic education. For this reason, I saw it was necessary to look outside the home to assist with this aspect of learning for my child. I knew that enrolling my child in a 4K program would benefit her by starting to develop learning skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten readiness</td>
<td>Social-emotional readiness</td>
<td>I knew my child needed to form more relationships with children her age because she had neither any prior experience in a childcare setting nor any exposure to family/friends of the same/near same age. 4K would give her that exposure and opportunity to form relationships with children of her same age.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten readiness</td>
<td>Both social-emotional and academic readiness</td>
<td>The primary purpose in enrolling our son in 4K was to help his speech and ability to make friends (which would come with improved speech). We also wanted him to be ready for kindergarten.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten readiness</td>
<td>Both social-emotional and academic readiness</td>
<td>We chose 4K because our daughter seems very &quot;school ready&quot; socially and academically, and we thought it would be a good transition to Kindergarten. We appreciated that her teacher still had a heavy emphasis on play and peer interactions, while still introducing basic reading and math skills.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E6. Parents’ ideas about structured learning environment influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structured learning</td>
<td>Structured learning</td>
<td>We did 4K for our child to experience the school atmosphere, relate with different children, and start to learn in a more structured environment with a little pressure than the daycare environment or home life.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured learning</td>
<td>We appreciated that her teacher still had a heavy emphasis on play and peer interactions, while still introducing basic reading and math skills. It was a very low-pressure setting that was the right balance of fun and a little bit of (non-stressful) challenge for our daughter.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I knew the program would be similar to the preschool program she was in, and I wanted her to do the same things in the actual elementary school environment she would be in for kindergarten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme</td>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>Number of parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School readiness</td>
<td>General school description</td>
<td>I strongly wanted our son to succeed and be ready for school, he also wanted and was ready for school</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuity from 4K to kindergarten (e.g., getting used to physical environment and people)</td>
<td>I wanted my daughter to be prepared for kindergarten. I thought that if I enrolled her in the 4K MMSD program she would be more prepared for when she was enrolled in kindergarten. She would know the school layout, the playground, and some familiar faces if she was enrolled in 4K at her Kindergarten school.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>My daughter had been in a preschool-like childcare environment with less than 8 kids ages 3-5 and doing pretty well. The benefit of 4K at the school where she would attend kindergarten was mostly about exposure to the environment, staff, and students, and learning to follow directions and cope with a larger group of kids her own age, and also gain independence in personal tasks like putting on a coat or putting her own things away.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s informational resources</td>
<td>Older siblings of 4K children</td>
<td>I had another kid that went to Charles Elementary school already for the 4K and kindergarten, and it was a great experience for him. Because of that, it was an easy decision to have my second kid go there as well. Plus, it was convenient to have them at the same school.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4K supply constraints</td>
<td>No 4K in kindergarten school</td>
<td>At the time of choosing a 4K program in the MMSD school district, the elementary school that my child's sibling attended did not have a 4K program. Therefore, we had to choose the next closest elementary school for my child to attend.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E8. Parents’ ideas about language learning influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language acquisition</td>
<td>Practice speaking English (Arabic, Nepali, Spanish)</td>
<td>Need to consider the English language skills of the student growing up in an ESL/bilingual homes. No tuvimos uno especifico solo que decidimos enviarlo ala escuela porque queriamos que aprendiera un poco mas de lo que en casa no aprende por ejemplo que aprendiera algunas palabras en ingles, ademas que queriamos que el comportamiento de ella mejorase debido aque en casa es la unica niña y cuando estaba con otros niños no queria compartir de sus juegos y juguetes, pero la razon mas importante es porque ella siempre nos mencionaba que queria asistir a la escuela de hecho todos los dias decia quiero ir ala escuela. Y ahorita ella es feliz no le gusta faltar ala escuela y eso nos hace feliz a nosotros como padres. We only decided to send him to school because we wanted him to learn a little more than what he does not learn at home, for example, to learn some words in English, in addition we wanted her behavior to improve because at home she is the only child.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengthen Spanish heritage through Spanish only or bilingual programs</strong></td>
<td>The fact that our MMSD school had a bilingual 4K program was our major consideration. We are a bilingual household, and it was extremely important for our child to enter school solidifying her bilingual language acquisition in an academic setting. The main reason why I chose the 4K program for my child at the school was because it was bilingual. It’s important that my kids know their culture and learn about it and that they keep learning their language for as long as they can. That is why I made the decision to put my kid in 4K in the school program.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E9. Parents’ flexibility in schedules influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schedules</td>
<td>Inflexible</td>
<td>We went to the next closest school. I thought it was an excellent program. My only concern is the difficulty of trying to work and facilitate a child's attendance at a school that lasts for 3 hours 4 days a week. You have to arrange for alternate transportation and alternative care, or you have to pick the child up. We were able to hire a nanny for our children for the days that I work but many parents can't do that, and I think those parents end up at private 4Ks because it is easier. That creates a socioeconomic divide in enrollment at public 4Ks. I think that 3 hours a day 4 days a week is a very good amount of time for a 4-year-old to be in school. However, given the economic and social pressure on families to keep both parents working, a better societal solution might be slightly longer 4K hours at public schools.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Fitting 4K into our schedule was easy for us because of strong family support and childcare as well as the fact that one of us worked from home and had a very flexible schedule. Several of our friends with children the same age did not enroll in 4K because they worked full time and needed a full day of childcare.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E10. Transportation availability and human resources influencing parents’ decisions

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of</td>
<td>Whether and where to send</td>
<td>MMSD transportation was a large part of our decision for our child to attend 4K. Transportation was provided from a childcare site to/from a 4K site, and that was the only way we could enroll our child in 4K, even though it meant our child would have to change schools for kindergarten (to our neighborhood school). While we considered our neighborhood MMSD school for 4K, transportation was not provided due to the childcare site being more than 1.5 miles away.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td>I LOVE the fact that MMSD offers a free preschool option for 4K students, but it would be ideal for all 4K students to have the ability to ride the bus regardless of whether they are far enough from school to meet the MMSD bus rules. […] Our childcare situation is different from previous years, and they cannot transport my child either to or from 4K. So, if my child doesn't get a walking exemption next year, I'm not sure if 4K will be possible.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of</td>
<td>Whether and where to send</td>
<td>We went to the next closest school, Mills. I thought it was an excellent program. My only concern is the difficulty of trying to work and facilitate a child's attendance at a school that lasts for 3 hours 4 days a week. You have to arrange for alternate transportation and alternative care, or you have to pick the child up. We were able to hire a nanny for our children for the days that I work but many parents can't do that, and I think those parents end up at private 4ks because it is easier. That creates a socioeconomic divide in enrollment at public 4ks. I think that 3 hours a day 4 days a week is a very good amount of time for a 4-year-old to be in school. However, given the economic and social pressure on families to keep both parents working, a better societal solution might be slightly longer 4K hours at public schools.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E11. Parents’ affordability of childcare influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>We looked at the MMSD public 4K. With two children, we cannot afford to pay for two separate providers, or a provider outside of the home, for that matter. We pay a nanny only slightly more than we would pay for childcare for one child under 2 in a center (younger sibling was born when the older child was 18 months).</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The cost of 4K programs is remarkably important for many families who are in middle to lower income brackets. Our family would have preferred a full day program option that did not come with exorbitant out of pocket costs. We chose the 4k program that we did primarily because it was school based in our district. We opted out of wraparound care or other childcare options due to cost, choosing instead to alter work shift schedules so that a parent could provide care for the remaining portion of the day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My struggle with my decision to send my daughter was because it was only a half day program and without transportation provided by my daycare provider or the school and my work location was too far away to commit to picking her up every day to take her to daycare. Fortunately, I found a neighbor that I ended up paying to transport my daughter every day, which actually made the experience more expensive since I still had to pay full-time for daycare to keep the slot as well as for the transportation. I think it was worth it, though; my daughter really loved the experience and was totally ready for all-day kindergarten this year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E12. Availability of special education services influencing parents’ decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special education availability</td>
<td>Madison school district offered speech therapy which my child was involved with in early childhood and continued in 4K until the school said he no longer needed the additional therapy.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme</td>
<td>Quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location resources</td>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td>We didn't think much outside of our neighborhood school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighborhood school had 4K. That was the only consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I had another kid that went to Charles Elementary school already for the 4K and kindergarten, and it was a great experience for him. Because of that, it was an easy decision to have my second kid go there as well. Plus, it was convenient to have them at the same school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social resources</td>
<td>Older siblings of 4K children</td>
<td>I was interested in 4K at Francesca Elementary school because I heard good things from my daycare provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking to teachers at the MMSD Phonology program where my son was enrolled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MMSD 4K helpline person was very helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare centers, special education service, district helpline, social programs, reviews on websites</td>
<td>I talked to a parent from my daughter's daycare center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We had neighbors who had had kids in the program and their feedback was important and reassuring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other parents, neighbors, family members</td>
<td>My mother was a kindergarten teacher in a public school in Iowa so I have a high confidence level in the education provided by public school systems. I had no doubt that the program at Charles Elementary school would be a successful one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E14. Descriptive statistics (%): Elementary 4K parents’ answers about their decision-making in the closed-ended survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>The number of 4K locations considered</th>
<th>The level of stress in decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch eligible</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the poverty thresholds</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Male</td>
<td>0.47/0.49</td>
<td>0.41/0.44</td>
<td>0.05/0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E15. Profiles of families in elementary 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ names</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>FRL</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parent’s gender</th>
<th>Parent’s employment</th>
<th>Children’s limited English Proficiency</th>
<th>Children’s special needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice Smith</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsa Marshall</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora Thompson</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber &amp; Glennis Jordan</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female &amp; Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adita Lewis</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/more</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy Turner</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Cooper</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes (her husband works night shifts)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel Castillo</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha Cunningham</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamala Thapa</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei Kou</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentlee Wong</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes (Working from home)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E16. Parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4K readiness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My son has an August 26th birthday. As a teacher, very young boys have never been my favorite to have in class. They're always a little on the immature side. When you talk for days from being ineligible, I had really thought seriously about holding him back, but my soon to be ex-husband [...] absolutely wants Tom to start school on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kindergarten readiness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[John’s] birthday is late August. We decided to, basically, hold it back one year. [...] We didn't feel like he was quite ready for kindergarten when he was turning five.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t want him to be in preschool another year because it’s not as structured. Yes, they were doing letters and some of that stuff, but for the most part, it’s free play and I didn’t want him to be held back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think there was a certain amount of routine and structure built into his day, but there was certainly lots of time for play and imagination and outside for recess and inside was sort of some free time, which was really, really great for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4K housed in Kindergarten</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt like it'd be nice to get him to go into the school, his sister was already there because she goes to school there. [...] He felt comfortable already at the school, so I think it helped him transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We chose Gilbert Elementary because we speak Spanish at home. Our boys both went to Spanish-only-4K and then to Dual Language Immersion (DLI) for Kindergarten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special education services</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reason we went for the 4K program for the Madison schools is because our oldest actually started in the 3K program, this is the pre-program again because she needed the extra services, so when she graduated from birth to three, they put her in there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chris and I are really pro-public schools, and I know the whole 4K program is public but we like the idea of being in one of Madison's own buildings as opposed to some of the private sites.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E17. Parents’ wrap-around care needs and their resources used for decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s name/gender</th>
<th>Wrap-around care needs</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Mobilization of their time and finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice Smith (F)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Location resources, (i.e., neighborhood) Social resources (i.e., school tour, call to the district, and other parents)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsa Marshall (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Location resources (i.e., neighborhood), Social resources (i.e., a district, a family member, and siblings)</td>
<td>Nanny hired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora Thompson (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Location resources (i.e., neighborhood), Social resources (i.e., district resources as part of 3K experiences)</td>
<td>District transportation provided between 3K/4K and daycare center, use of part-time day-care center, use of help from retired children’s grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber/Glennis Jordan (F/M)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Location resources (i.e., neighborhood), Social resources (i.e., information gained from her job)</td>
<td>Nanny hired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adita Lewis (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Location resources (i.e., neighborhood), Social resources (i.e., district resources as part of 3K experiences)</td>
<td>Transportation provided by herself from 4K to preschool during work hours, full-price of preschool enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy Turner (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Social resources (i.e., siblings, information gained from her job)</td>
<td>District transportation provided between 4K and preschool, Preschool arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Cooper (F)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Social resources (i.e., call to the district and siblings)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Location Resources</td>
<td>Social Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel Castillo</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Social resources (i.e., neighborhood) and Social resources (i.e., school district websites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha Cunningham</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Social resources (i.e., information gained from her job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamala Thapa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Location resources, (i.e., neighborhood) and Social resources (i.e., friends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei Kou</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Location resources, (i.e., neighborhood) and Social resources (i.e., siblings, district resources as part of 3K experiences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentlee Wong</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Location resources (i.e., neighborhood)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C1. Descriptive statistics (%) of childcare 4K parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree or equivalent</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or technical school</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or more</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C2. Descriptive statistics (%) of childcare 4K parents’ childcare arrangements and their children’s kindergarten entrance age range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare experience during 0-3 years</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home with a parent/guardian</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home with a relative/non-relative</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside home with others</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family daycare</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care center</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s kindergarten entrance age range</td>
<td>5.01-6.05</td>
<td>5.30-5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>66</sup> Others include a family member, friend, or neighbor.
Table C3. Structural and process quality that childcare 4K parents considered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural quality</td>
<td>Most of the important decision making came when we chose a childcare facility for our child when she was 2.5 years old. It was important to us at that point that the center had accredited 4K, but essentially our actual decision around where to attend 4K was already made by the time she was of age to do so.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I made the decision based mainly on the early childhood focus of preschool versus an elementary site. The resources available at a preschool and the teacher’s experience in the age group was the biggest factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process quality</td>
<td>Our older child attended 4K in a MMSD school. Although my child enjoyed it, I felt it was a little too child led. [...] I thought that his time in the classroom could have been better spent with some free choice and some more teacher-initiated learning. Our second son, the one the survey is asking about, went to his preschool that was a community site for 4K. I felt that he got a much more well-rounded experience at the community site and that the teachers actively looked for ways to balance child-led and teacher-led activities.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It was important for our family that the 4K program and wrap-around care be delivered by teachers united in a philosophy that values diversity and holds all students to high standards. At the 4K level, this includes reflecting on social-emotional growth. While it was nice to see that my child demonstrated academic readiness, I was more concerned that the program would create a safe, caring community in which all individuals are welcome and valued.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C4. Parents’ ideas about kindergarten readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional and academic readiness</td>
<td>We were aware that 4K is focused on academics. Since we knew and had confidence in our daughter's teachers, we expected that this wouldn't detract from the general focus on social-emotional development that we so valued at our daughter's preschool. Our daughter already knew her letters and numbers and so we hoped that in the 4K program she would be encouraged to develop her literacy and numeracy skills even further. The 4K program also gave us confidence that our daughter will be able to meet all expectations about school readiness at the end of the 4K year.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional readiness</td>
<td>We weren't concerned with language development, motor skills, etc, but did want to make sure our son's 4K program was a supportive environment that taught emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and social skills. We talked to the teachers about the curriculum and we were pleased that it contained a lot of this material. We observed the class on a few occasions and talked to the teachers before deciding the program was right for him. This was a program at the same daycare center where he received care the year before 4K.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic readiness</td>
<td>I wanted my child to be able to recognize the alphabet and know his numbers.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C5. Parents’ ideas about school readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School readiness with generic terms</td>
<td>I wanted him to continue to develop [readiness skills to be successful in school], although overall, he was ahead of where he needed to be entering 4K, so I had no concerns.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about rules and getting used to the setting</td>
<td>I wanted to make sure that my child learned about classroom routines, cleaning up and that there were times the teacher emphasized paying good attention.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued friendships</td>
<td>I knew that my child would attend 4K at a site other than the daycare she had been at (they were not a 4K site). I knew my child could easily adapt to a new environment, so I was open to moving her to another site. I wanted her to attend 4K where she would be with other students in our neighborhood (her daycare was on the other side of town). If her daycare had included students from our attendance area, I probably would have had her remain there, instead of moving her to a different 4K site.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C6: Parents’ ideas about structure of learning environment influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this stage, I was primarily concerned with my child developing socio-emotional skills and being in a warm, nurturing environment. I chose the school where I thought these needs would best be met, which happened to be the program he was already at. I did not want to force my child into a heavily structured, 'academic' program at such a young age.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that 4K is a fundamental opportunity for children to begin to understand the structure of formal education in a safe environment while still allowing children to explore and have free play.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C7. Parents’ preferences in continuity and familiarity influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued use of the same childcare center</td>
<td>For us the 4K decision was easy: 4K was offered throughout the childcare center and we were already pleased with the talents, knowledge, and expertise of the educators there. We did not research any other 4K programs because 4K was offered within our normal childcare setting.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to familiarity</td>
<td>I selected the 4K program because it was the same place that he went to early childcare, and I know empirically that they are a great team of professionals that will help my son to thrive in all aspects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We kept our son in the program at his daycare. We considered MMSD [elementary 4K], but no program was available at his kindergarten site and we didn't want him to transition to two different schools. Also, transportation mid-day would have been very challenging for us.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having on-site wrap-around care that provided an early enough start and went late enough into the afternoon was a primary concern. I am a single parent and needed to be sure I could drop off and pick up my daughter while getting to work on time and leaving work late enough.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In a family where both parents work full time, we felt like our choices were very limited to where we could have full-time care. After looking into a few half-day programs, we ended up choosing a site where full-day care was an option.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The times offered through MMSD--half days, 4 days/week--are completely incompatible with a work schedule. Since we would need to find childcare for the remainder of the work week, we ended up going with a community site and paying steep tuition. I wish that there were better offerings to bridge the free MMSD 4K with other centers or in-home programs for the rest of the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C8. Availability of special education services influencing parents’ decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special education service</td>
<td>My son is on the autism spectrum and one of the biggest deciding factors for us was that our 4k site allowed his ABA therapists to attend with him for part of each day. We decided that another year of the in-class ABA help would be much more beneficial for him.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C9. Parents’ sources of information influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information gained from using the current childcare</td>
<td>I selected the 4K program because it was the same place that he went to early childcare, and I know empirically that they are a great team of professionals that will help my son to thrive in all aspects mentioned earlier.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare plans for 4K child’s younger siblings</td>
<td>One of the factors that influenced our decision was that we had a 2-year-old starting preschool the year our older daughter was starting kindergarten. Having our older daughter do the 4K program at our preschool allowed us to be a &quot;current&quot; family when registering our younger daughter for preschool, so we got priority registration. We probably would have attended the same 4K program even if it was okay because of the center’s location: close to home, close to work, and a younger sibling at the same center”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents</td>
<td>We chose [our childcare center] because it was highly suggested by local moms and during a walk through it had everything we wanted. We are glad, would send our next child and would recommend it to others.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ own career trajectory</td>
<td>I made the decision based mainly on the early childhood focus of preschool versus an elementary site. The resources available at a preschool and the teacher's experience in the age group was the biggest factor. Didn't want this to be early kindergarten. Also, my opinions were shaped largely by my background - I got my degree in elementary education at UW Madison and taught kindergarten in private schools until my oldest child was born and I have stayed at home raising my four kids since then.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C10. Descriptive statistics (%): Childcare 4K parents’ answers about their decision-making in the closed-ended survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>The number of 4K locations considered</th>
<th>The level of stress level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch eligible</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the poverty thresholds</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Male</td>
<td>0.43/0.54</td>
<td>0.39/0.48</td>
<td>0.04/0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ names</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliana Kim</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara Stephens</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamar Wagner</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Carey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katalia Alvarez</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan Spencer</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo Mueller</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlyn Wu</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida Welch</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson Collins</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C12. Parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>Kindergarten readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She’s learned a lot. She needed to go to summer 4K. She didn't necessarily need to, but her math—[Her 4K teacher] said something about math and literacy. She was a little bit behind it. So, to kind of keep her in the school pace, that's why I put them in summer school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think overloading kids with academics early is not what we want. So, you don't want 4K to become more of that. It really should be about socio-emotional development and getting used to being in that setting. And so as long as they're doing that and emphasizing that then that's what they should be doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We knew that we wanted that experience, like that transition experience is important. [...] I think in that way 4K was a really good experience for him to try to get that under his belt, to know what some of the routines were going to look like, and get more practice working in a small group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess 4K was a good buffer that's to help her to set rules. She carries her own backpack every day, then kind of packs up her own stuff, and then listens to the teacher and all those basic rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For us, we are not really interested in getting her into a study mode really early on. As parents we want her to enjoy herself through play as much as possible. That also lets us favor a daycare setting rather than a school setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity/familiarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity for him is a big thing. And being very familiar with the place he already is and having the transition happen even the summer before into 4K, for us, made the decision really easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An important part of our choice was a 4K that would incorporate an introduction to Spanish, so that it would be more familiar when starting [DLI] Kindergarten. Mills childcare center is the only school that I'm aware of that has a bilingual teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easton had an IEP, individualized education program. Is that IEP? He had an IEP because he had a stutter, a disfluency. So that's another thing about our daycare, they were very good about getting a speech pathologist/speech therapist over to work with him during 4K.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C13. Parents’ wrap-around care needs and their resources used for decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s names/Gender</th>
<th>Wrap-around care needs</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Mobilization of their time, finance, and other resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliana Kim (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Current childcare center (childcare director), district website, proximity to home</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara Stephens (F)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Current childcare center (teacher), proximity to home</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamar Wagner (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Visits, quality rating system</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Carey (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>4K child’s siblings’ experiences at the same center</td>
<td>Part-time job, pick-ups/drop-offs done by herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katalia Alvarez (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Current childcare center, quality rating system</td>
<td>Coordination among the center’s location on a bus route, open/close time, and her work hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan Spencer (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Current childcare center (childcare director), visits</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules, childcare budget considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo Mueller (M)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Current childcare center, tours, family members’ experiences, proximity to home</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules, childcare budget considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlyn Wu (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Current childcare center, district websites, colleagues at work, proximity to home</td>
<td>Flexible schedule, childcare budget considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida Welch (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Visits, social networks, proximity to home</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules, childcare budget considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson Collins (M)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>District websites, 4K child’s siblings’ experiences, tuition assistantship related information</td>
<td>Inflexible work schedules, childcare budget considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table H1. Descriptive statistics (%) of Head Start 4K parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree or equivalent</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or technical school</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or more</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Education needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H2. Descriptive statistics (%) of Head Start 4K parents’ 0-3 childcare experiences and their children’s kindergarten entrance age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare experience during 0-3 years</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home with a parent/guardian</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home with a relative/non-relative</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside home with others</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family daycare</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care center</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s kindergarten entrance age range</td>
<td>5.09-5.86</td>
<td>5.20-5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table H3. Parents’ consideration of their children’s 4K readiness to decide whether to enroll them in 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4K readiness</td>
<td>Our child makes friends easily so we had no problems moving to a new facility where she did not know anyone.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She recognizes her name and tries to write. She started to count from 1 to 10 in English and Spanish.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 Others include a family member, friend, or neighbor.
Table H4. Parents’ consideration of their children’s kindergarten readiness to decide whether to enroll them in 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional and academic readiness</td>
<td>I wanted a 4K program that would incorporate some academics into their play-based curriculum such that my child is developing the necessary academic skills along with important social skills.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional readiness</td>
<td>Because our child was in the foster care system, we wanted to be able to provide her with a classroom that would work with her social and emotional development. Considering her situation, she was able to thrive in the classroom and we knew she was ready for kindergarten.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic readiness</td>
<td>Because I think she needed it [(academic readiness)]. Plus, she learned a lot with counting and letters”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table H5. Head Start 4K availability influencing parents’ decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>close to your home (N)</th>
<th>close to your or your spouse or co-parent's workplace (N)</th>
<th>in the school or district you prefer (N)</th>
<th>located in the school your child will go for kindergarten (N)</th>
<th>the school your other children attend (N)</th>
<th>required your child to change to a new setting (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-4K</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main theme</td>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>Number of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s current childcare center</td>
<td>Older daughter was enrolled in a child care center that later became a 4K program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td><a href="https://www.reachdane.org">https://www.reachdane.org</a> (Reach Dane did the enrollment) and Social media.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H7. Descriptive statistics (%): HS 4K parents’ answers about their decision-making in the closed-ended survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>The number of 4K locations considered</th>
<th>The level of stress level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch eligible</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Special Education needs</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Male</td>
<td>0.62/0.38</td>
<td>0.38/0.29</td>
<td>0.24/0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ names</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrianna Gonzalez</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Miller</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table H9 Parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OK. Él -- yo decidí que no fuera a 4K porque para mí Maximiliano está muy chiquito para que estuviera en un salón tan grande Preferí que fuera a &quot;head start&quot;. Porque es algo más apropiado para los niños, más chiquito, para niños de su edad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, I decided that he wouldn't go to 4K because Maximiliano is too little to be in such a big room. I decided that he went to &quot;Head start&quot; instead. And I decided to send him to &quot;Head Start&quot; because it's more appropriate for him because it's a bit of a little room for kids his age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the time he was 4, he was ready to go to 4K. He was all set. He knew his ABCs from being at daycare and being with me, and just he was always learning something and I wanted him to be adventurous and everything.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenía la experiencia porque ya había pasado con mis hijos. Y ya tenía la experiencia, me encantaba ese programa pero tuve que volver a ir a buscar la información.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, I had the experience because I already had it with my older kids. And I had the experience because I loved that program but I had to go again and get the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have different places that you can go through like 211. You can also like, when you take your kids to WIC to get their monthly and yearly checks, they give you all types of information, referring to 4K and all the programs that’s going on for kids. 211 tells you all the information that you want to know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H10. Parents’ wrap-around care needs and their resources used for decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s name/ Gender</th>
<th>Wrap-around care needs</th>
<th>Mobilization of their time, finance, and other resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrianna Gonzalez (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Alternative work schedule between her and her husband, transportation provided by the Head Start, special education service arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Miller (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Support from her grandmother for paid wrap-around care, transportation provided by the Head Start</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N1. Descriptive statistics (%) of No-4K parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree or equivalent</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or technical school</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or more</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</strong></td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table N2. Descriptive statistics (%) of No-4K parents’ 0-3 childcare experiences and their children’s kindergarten entrance age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare experience during 0-3 years</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home with a parent/guardian</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home with a relative/non-relative</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside home with others(^{68})</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family daycare</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care center</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s kindergarten entrance age range</td>
<td>4.89-6.17</td>
<td>4.91-6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{68}\) Others include a family member, friend, or neighbor.
Table N3. Structural and process quality that parents considered for their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural quality</td>
<td>We needed a supportive environment with a teacher that had experience.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process quality</td>
<td>I liked how he was developing at the play-based in-home Center we had him in since he was a baby. He could sound out words, had friends, and engaged in complex imaginative play. He also showed signs of stress in unfamiliar settings and was very young for his grade. So I was hesitant as to when and whether to do a 4K program through MMSD.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Her preschool was already teaching to the same academic standards as MMSD 4K. We also felt she personally needed more social-emotional support rather than academic support. Her preschool teachers were familiar with and supportive of her social-emotional needs. We felt that maintaining her relationship with them and with her preschool classmates was extremely important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table N4. Parents’ ideas about 4K readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4K readiness</td>
<td>I liked how he was developing at the play-based in-home center we had him in since he was a baby. He could sound out words, had friends, and engaged in complex imaginative play. He also showed signs of stress in unfamiliar settings and was very young for his grade. So, I was hesitant as to when and whether to do a 4K program through MMSD.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I thought [my child] was up to speed on all of these [(physical, social-emotional, academic, and school readiness)] if not on the advanced side of things and was fine where she was and did not need to attend a formal 4K program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N5. Parents’ ideas about kindergarten readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether to enroll in non-district 4K programs or kindergarten</td>
<td>I thought about [my child’s social-emotional, academic, and school readiness], but since my child was in a private 4K program for young 4-year-olds I had the option to have her repeat 4K before kindergarten in the older 4-year-old program. I was more concerned with deciding if she was ready for kindergarten or if she should do another year of older 4K this year.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My child did not qualify for 4K because of the September 1st cut-off date. Her birthday is later in September. It was a disappointment as she was ready for it and had already gone to pre-school. I chose to skip 4K this school year and early enroll her in kindergarten this year because once again she was ready. It would be really great if the same enrollment dates (with an option to early enroll) were in place for 4K and Kindergarten. Too late for us, but school children starting up in the coming years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our daughter has a September birthday--so while she was in a 4K preschool classroom during the 2016-2017 academic year, she was not officially enrolled in 4k (because she was not age-eligible). This year (2017-2018), she would've been age-eligible to go through the 4k program at her former preschool, but for various reasons we decided to send her to kindergarten during this year, which should technically have been her 4K year. She is academically pretty advanced, and our preschool was incredibly expensive even with a 4k subsidy, so we chose to go ahead and send her despite our concerns about social development and the demands of kindergarten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N6. Parents’ ideas about readiness needing to be developed during the 4K year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten readiness without specifying areas</td>
<td>I wanted to ensure the program I placed my son in, would provide him the best opportunity to ready him for kindergarten.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In our case, our care provider outside of the home left our child well-prepared for kindergarten without a formalized 4K program...this left us with a comfort level to consider, but ultimately decide against, enrollment in a 4K program. Our younger son is now with the same care provider, but the care provider is retiring around the time our son would be ready for 4K -- so for him, we may end up doing a 4K program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic readiness</td>
<td>We were seeking a program that was focused on early literacy, math, art, and science to ensure kindergarten readiness. Behavioral training was less of a factor, as our daughter gained those skills at pooh bear childcare.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Social-emotional and academic readiness</td>
<td>Because he did not attend a 'regular' daycare, our primary concerns were with 'socializing', especially learning how to deal with being part of a larger group. We were also somewhat interested in having him stimulated academically and learning things like counting and letters, though we did not have specific goals in that regard.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social emotional readiness</td>
<td>We had no achievement-gap concerns for our child but appreciated her opportunity to practice socio-emotional skill-building, kindness/empathy, and to get a taste of what a kindergarten classroom would be like.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N7. Parents’ ideas about school readiness influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School readiness in a general term</td>
<td>I wanted him to see what school was about so that the transition to kindergarten would not be a shock.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines, expectations, rules</td>
<td>We were not as concerned with the academic preparation she would receive as we don't find that a crucial piece of the puzzle for 4-year-olds. We value her ability to navigate social situations appropriately and learn how to exist in a busy, fast-moving classroom environment over being able to read when she entered kindergarten.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table N8. Parents’ preferences in curriculum influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>We had our child in a private Montessori preschool from age 18 months to 5 years old, part-time. They did not offer 4K through the public schools. We liked the program so decided to keep her there. We wish there were a public Montessori curriculum in Madison. We like the child-led approach and focus on community and other aspects of Montessori education.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think that a child-centered play-based 4K system is best. As an educator, it seems best to provide opportunities for social play and some academics that are primarily done through exploration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N9. Parents’ preferences in familiarity and continuity influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity and continuity for their children</td>
<td>From what I know about my child I felt that keeping her at her current preschool would provide coherence and stability for her as I transitioned back to full-time work. She was already very familiar with the staff and the student community. She was at the time also a bit reserved with adults, so keeping her at this school seemed like the best choice for her.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All of these measures [(physical, social-emotional, academic, and school readiness)] were important to us, and everything was going very well in her childcare center, which was also 5-star accredited, so the decision to continue that course was easy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The hours are so short for 4K. I would absolutely send my kids to public school 4K if the day were a little bit longer. My child is used to a six-hour school day and it would be weird to send him to public 4K for such a short day and then expect him to re-transition back to a 7:20 - 3:00 school day for kindergarten. Right? If he's used to a six-hour day, why switch him to a shorter day only to switch back again a year later. Also, finding start and end times for a particular school is crazy hard to find (When does the bus come, when does it drop off, how long are they actually in the classroom, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavailability of 4K at their kindergarten schools</td>
<td>My daughter stayed at her preschool for the 4K year because she would have to go to 4K at a site that would not be her kindergarten site. I was not going to switch her two times for 4K and then again for kindergarten. So, she stayed at Montessori.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N10. Benefits of using the same non-district 4K for parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of continuity for parents</td>
<td>The hours for 4K are NOT conducive to having two working parents. Unless the daycare happens to link up with a 4K program in your district and provides transportation, the hours for 4K are basically impossible. Kids start after normal work hours and are done before lunch. Unless you happen to have that childcare transportation, nanny, or friend/relative that can help out, 4K is impossible. At least it was for us and was never an option. We felt confident in the childcare/preschool program the child was already in and felt that between that and the support that she received at home that she was lucky to be well prepared for kindergarten this year and has been thriving.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a two-parent working household, our main need was wrap-around childcare. I liked the idea of having my son at his daycare center the entire day, and not having to worry about transportation. Since our daycare was out of the MMSD I was grateful for open enrollment. We live a block away from Gregory Elementary, but we would have had to make completely different childcare arrangements to attend there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table N11. Parents’ financial resources influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ affordability</td>
<td>This all [(my child’s skills)] in the end is not relevant as I soon found out I could not send my child to 4K. It was frustrating as she seemed so ready and had friends slightly older than her who could go. Her birthday is later in September after the September 1st cut-off date. Each of those abilities did convince me my daughter was ready to attend 4K. But she couldn't unless I paid for it and that was too expensive for me. Cost. The full-time 4K option we chose through our preschool was much more expensive than the MMSD program. We couldn't choose MMSD however because our preschool didn't have wrap-around care and luckily our family can afford the higher cost. I bet others have to make a different choice.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table N12. Availability of special education services influencing parents’ decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of special education services</td>
<td>My son was assessed by MMSD with significant delays in social and adaptive categories when he was a 3-years-old in preschool. I wanted to pick a program that would allow for the continuation of his IEP services as well as make sure his teachers and school leadership were going to be willing and helpful partners.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table N13. Parents’ information influencing their decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information from their current childcare centers/preschools</td>
<td>For us it was important to stay at the same facility knowing that his level of education would be on par with the MMSD 4K he could have received. I knew the selected program does an excellent job at making sure the children are kindergarten ready.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents and non-district websites</td>
<td>Other parents of same-aged children. My internet mommy board. People from community center, who give English class for adults.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers, districts, district websites, and social programs</td>
<td>There was not enough information sent to parents following enrollment in the MMSD summer school 4K. I had to make several phone calls to get teacher names, school supply/material lists, classroom numbers, etc. Once the program started, we found it to be beneficial for our daughter. We were not able to participate in the MMSD 4K during the school year, as it was only 1/2 day, and there was no wrap-around care. Hence, she also went through the private 4K at Little Things. MMSD Speech/Language Team. Teachers at non-4K sites.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N14. Descriptive statistics (%): No-4K parents’ answers about decision-making in the closed-ended survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>The number of 4K locations considered</th>
<th>The level of stress level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all - a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial or other</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch eligible</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the poverty thresholds</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Special Education needs</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Male</td>
<td>0.37/0.45</td>
<td>0.32/0.41</td>
<td>0.05/0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N15. Profiles of families in No-4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ names</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>FRL</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parent’s gender</th>
<th>Parent’s employment</th>
<th>Children’s limited English proficiency</th>
<th>Children’s special needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Anderson</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Pittman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Austin</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila Adams</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian Griffith</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Lambert</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Stewart</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/More</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table N16. Parents’ decisions about whether and where their children would attend 4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether</th>
<th>4K readiness</th>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The childcare director talked with us about 4K and said, “we think she’s ready to move up”. And we wanted to move her to a 4K classroom. We thought she was ready for the challenge, and we thought she was getting a little bored in the 3K classroom.</td>
<td>He wasn’t ready to be in a giant school environment. It was just for him. That was the best decision. He had established relationships already with the kids he was with. [...] It was hard enough for him to transition to the 4K room and have it more structured than it had been in the previous classroom.</td>
<td>We were really interested in a play-based type of curriculum. Some of the 4K programs are getting too academic focused, which I don’t think is good for four-year-olds – they should be playing. So there’s a nice mix of that program, which was also something we were interested in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only thing he would be kind of getting in addition to staying at home would be just kind of being in a school structure or the environment and some of those social interactions. But then we also know what he is like. When he would be around other kids or in social situations, we were kind of watching if he is awkward and he is playing with other kids. We didn't see any kind of hesitation, awkwardness, and inappropriateness.</td>
<td>I left their dad when the kids were three. One because he was abusive and he didn’t see [my children] even for a long time, but now he’s starting to see them again. And [my 4K child] has problems because he witnessed a lot and his one comfort has always been with me and I felt like when I left, “do I want to change his whole life, have him go to a daycare now?” and I thought no, he needs to have some familiarity. We already just moved.</td>
<td>The one thing that made it very easy to consider was we were already familiar with the school and the teachers but also there was no-4K program at our home elementary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s name/Gender</td>
<td>Wrap-around care needs</td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Anderson (F)</td>
<td>O (has a husband working from home)</td>
<td>District, tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Pittman (M)</td>
<td>O (has a stay-home wife)</td>
<td>His knowledge coming from his occupation, a teacher in the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Austin (F)</td>
<td>O (has a husband working from home)</td>
<td>Did not know that there was free, half-day 4K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila Adams (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Word of mouth from her friend and people who had gone to the same childcare, information gained from continuing the same childcare center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian Griffith (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>The information gained from continuing the same childcare center (childcare director), 4K child’s siblings’ experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Lambert (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>The information gained from continuing the same childcare center (childcare director, information session, teacher), knowing that the home elementary school doesn’t provide 4K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Stewart (F)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Information gained from continuing the same childcare center, word of mouth, and knowing that the home elementary school doesn’t provide 4K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: SURVEY & INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

1. Parent/guardian survey with the response distribution

Study of Early Care and Education Choices
Parent/Guardian Survey

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) and University of Wisconsin-Madison are interested in how families in Madison make decisions about their child’s 4K year. We hope that by understanding family needs and preferences about 4K, the district can develop program options that meet those needs.

This survey is designed to capture perspectives on how families like yours chose a 4K program last year and the factors that influenced those decisions. Even if you decided not to send your 4-year old to a 4K program last year, we are interested in hearing about the process you went through as your family made decisions about care.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please remember that all information you provide will be kept completely confidential.

1. Please answer these questions thinking about your kindergarten-aged child.

What is your relationship to this child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relationship</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Next, we’d like to ask about your child’s primary care arrangements from birth to 3 years old.

Thinking about the years from birth to 3-years old, please indicate each of the places where your child received primary care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care Arrangement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a parent or guardian?</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a relative?</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a nonrelative?</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…outside your home with a family member, friend or neighbor?</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a family day care with other children?</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at Early Head Start?</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a child care center?</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other arrangements, please tell us:
3. Parents consider many things when they make decisions about their children. Last year, did you think about enrolling your child in a 4K program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes, in the same site or program he/she was already enrolled in for child care</th>
<th>No  →  Go to question 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Last year, how many 4K program locations did you consider for your child?

______ Number of 4K programs considered: (Missing 1%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Last year, which specific 4K programs did you consider enrolling your child in?

6. Last year, how stressful was the decision-making process related to 4K?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all stressful</th>
<th>A little stressful</th>
<th>Somewhat stressful</th>
<th>Very stressful</th>
<th>Extremely stressful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Last year, when you were considering enrolling your child in a 4K program, did you or your family speak with any of the following people to help you make a decision?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers or staff at 4K sites</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child’s pediatrician</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous child care provider(s)</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or family members not including your spouse or co-parent</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people → please tell us:</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Last year, when you were considering enrolling your child in a 4K program, did you or your family use any of the following resources to help you make a decision?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MMSD website</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4K program websites</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care ratings from the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) or Youngstar</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits or classroom observations</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other resources— → Please tell us:</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Last year, when you were considering enrolling your child in 4K, did your child’s development in any of the following abilities and skills at the time have an impact on your decision?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross motor skills (i.e., jumping, skipping, or moving around without stumbling)?</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine motor skills (i.e., holding pencil properly or buttoning clothing)?</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make friends easily?</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be empathetic or take another’s point of view?</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to take turns?</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be understood by other adults when speaking?</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to read or mimic reading?</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to tell connected and coherent stories?</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to follow directions?</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to count to ten?</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to ask questions to understand the world around them?</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to recognize letters in his or her name?</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to cope with frustration?</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to adjust to new situations?</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to concentrate?</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness skills to be successful in school?</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Thinking about the questions you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how did each of these impact your decision about 4K for your child?
11. Last year, how much influence did each of the following 4K program characteristics have on your decision about 4K for your child?

**Whether or not the 4K program...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>A little influence</th>
<th>Some influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit of influence</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...was accredited?</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had a good reputation?</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...encouraged diversity?</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was affordable</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had good food?</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had transportation?</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was clean?</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was safe?</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...felt welcoming?</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...felt structured?</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had a schedule that worked for you and your family?</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had wrap-around care?</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Last year, how much influence did each of the following location-based characteristics have on your decision about 4K for your child?

**Whether or not the 4K program...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>A little influence</th>
<th>Some influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit of influence</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...was located close to your home?</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was located close to your or your spouse or co-parent’s workplace?</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was in the school or district you prefer?</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was located in the school your child will go for kindergarten?</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...was the school your other children attend?</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...required your child to change to a new setting?</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Last year, how much influence did each of the following staffing characteristics have on your decision about 4K for your child?  

**Whether or not the 4K program…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>A little influence</th>
<th>Some influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit of influence</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…had diverse staff and students?</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had a good child to staff ratio?</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had good communication with parents? (Missing 4.4%)</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had staff that was warm and trustworthy?</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had staff with values that are similar to your own values?</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had staff that was educated or trained in child development?</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had good leadership?</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…had low staff turnover?</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Last year, how much influence did each of the following education-based characteristics have on your decision about 4K for your child?  

**Whether or not the 4K program…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>A little influence</th>
<th>Some influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit of influence</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…taught early reading skills?</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…taught early math skills?</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…prepared your child for the transition to kindergarten?</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…helped your child make friends and socialize?</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…included religious education?</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…taught social skills?</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…used play-based teaching?</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…provided one-on-one teaching?</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…taught directly the skills needed to be successful?</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…used whole group instruction to ensure all children have access to knowledge?</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…could provide the kind of educational experience you could not provide at home?</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. Thinking about when your child was eligible to go to 4K, please indicate each of the
places where your child received care as part of a child care arrangement.

Did your child receive care…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a parent or guardian?</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a relative?</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at home with a nonrelative?</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…outside your home with a family member, friend, or neighbor?</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a family day care with other children?</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at Head Start?</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a child care center?</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a MMSD 4K school program?</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a MMSD 4K Head Start program?</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at a MMSD Community site?</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in a 4K or paid preschool program not in the MMSD?</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other arrangements, please tell us:

If you answered “No” to these questions, and your child did not go to a 4K program last year, please skip to Question 19 on page 7. If your child did go to a 4K program last year, please continue to Question 16.

16. Last year when you were enrolling your child in 4K, were you on any waitlist for any 4K programs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No (\Rightarrow) Go to question 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Last year, how many 4K program waitlists were you on? (Missing 57.3%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waitlists</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. Last year when you were enrolling your child in 4K, how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the enrollment process at the 4K program that was your top choice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>A little satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied/dissatisfied</th>
<th>A little dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The available time slots?</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The waitlist procedure?</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The communication and information about enrollment procedures?</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dates for enrollment?</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ease of the enrollment process?</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. The next set of questions asks about your thoughts on Early Childhood Education. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to know what you think.

These scales represent different ideas about how children grow and learn. Please mark the circle that best represents how you think about Early Childhood Education for 4-year-olds.

Which is a more important goal of education programs for 4-year-olds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic preparation</th>
<th>Social and emotional growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot more important</td>
<td>A lot more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat more important</td>
<td>Somewhat more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little more important</td>
<td>A little more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally important</td>
<td>Equally important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little more important</td>
<td>A little more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat more important</td>
<td>Somewhat more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot more important</td>
<td>A lot more important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Academic Preparation**
  - A lot more important: 4.8%
  - Somewhat more important: 2.6%
  - A little more important: 2.8%
  - Equally important: 26.4%
  - A little more important: 9.6%
  - Somewhat more important: 21.0%
  - A lot more important: 32.8%

- **Social and Emotional Growth**

20. Which is a more effective way for 4-year olds to learn: through **direct instruction**, where the teacher stands in front of the class and presents the information; or through **active experience**, where children take part in hands-on, collaborative or project-based learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Instruction</th>
<th>Active Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot more effective</td>
<td>A lot more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat more effective</td>
<td>Somewhat more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little more effective</td>
<td>A little more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally effective</td>
<td>Equally effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little more effective</td>
<td>A little more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat more effective</td>
<td>Somewhat more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot more effective</td>
<td>A lot more effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Direct Instruction**
  - A lot more effective: 3.4%
  - Somewhat more effective: 1.0%
  - A little more effective: 0.4%
  - Equally effective: 15.4%
  - A little more effective: 6.7%
  - Somewhat more effective: 21.3%
  - A lot more effective: 51.8%

- **Active Experience**
21. Which is a more effective way for 4-year olds to learn? Through activities that are **initiated by the teacher** or through activities that are **initiated by the child**?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Equally effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-initiated</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-initiated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Which is the more important role for a teacher to play in a classroom for 4-year olds: **providing knowledge** by giving children facts and information; or **facilitating learning** by providing resources and support to the children so they can take control of their own learning process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot more important</th>
<th>Somewhat more important</th>
<th>A little more important</th>
<th>Equally important</th>
<th>A little more important</th>
<th>Somewhat more important</th>
<th>A lot more important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing knowledge</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. Which is a more effective learning format for 4-year olds: a **group-oriented** format or an **individualized, one-to-one** format?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Equally effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group-oriented</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual, one-to-one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24. Which is a more effective way for 4-year olds to learn: through interacting with adults or through interacting with other children their age? (Missing 10%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Equally effective</th>
<th>A little more effective</th>
<th>Somewhat more effective</th>
<th>A lot more effective</th>
<th>Other children their age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. Is it better for class materials and resources to be handed out by a teacher only, or for class materials and resources to be accessible for children to use whenever they want?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handed out by the teacher only</th>
<th>A lot better</th>
<th>Somewhat better</th>
<th>A little better</th>
<th>Equally good</th>
<th>A little better</th>
<th>Somewhat better</th>
<th>A lot better</th>
<th>Accessible for children to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

4K is an unnecessary pressure on a young child.

Would you say...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27. Last year, did you work for pay outside the home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No → Go to question 29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
28. For this question, please answer in whichever format makes the most sense for you and your work schedule.

Last year during most weeks, how many days per week or hours per week did you usually work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual # of days per week</th>
<th>Usual # of hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing 18.9%)  (Missing 52.5%)  

29. Is there anything that we haven’t asked that would be important for us to know to understand your family’s 4K decision?
Parent Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your family. (family members, employment, and neighborhood)

2. I’d like you to think back across [child’s name] care and education settings before 4K – what were they?
   - How did you choose them?
   - Anything you particularly liked or didn’t like?

3. And what about 4K – what was it like?
   - Anything you particularly liked or didn’t like?

4. Then specifically about the 4K decision. Can you talk me through that decision – who you talked to, where you got information, etc.
   - What kinds of things did you have to keep in mind as you made your decisions?
   - How did scheduling fit into your decision – managing both your schedule and the programs?

5. If you could describe a perfect 4K setting for your child, what would it be like?
   - How did the program that s/he experienced compare to your ideal one?

6. Tell me about your child’s kindergarten experience.
   - Seeing your child’s kindergarten experience, how do you think about 4K?

7. If you could have a do-over, would you make the same decision about 4K? How would it be the same or different?

8. If the district was to call for family ideas about 4K – as a way to make the program better – what would you want them to know?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for the district</td>
<td>Other facilities/programs&lt;br&gt;Enrollment information&lt;br&gt;What is 4K?&lt;br&gt;4K at public school sites&lt;br&gt;Schedule&lt;br&gt;Cost&lt;br&gt;Transportation&lt;br&gt;Pick up/ Drop off&lt;br&gt;Curriculum&lt;br&gt;Diversity/Critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s accommodations</td>
<td>Choice of their 2nd option&lt;br&gt;Use of human resources&lt;br&gt;Stay-at- home parent&lt;br&gt;Hourly childcare&lt;br&gt;Multiple arrangements&lt;br&gt;Moving&lt;br&gt;Working schedule shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Familiar quality (including Practical features)&lt;br&gt;Structural quality&lt;br&gt;Process quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural values/preferences</td>
<td>Reputation of the school&lt;br&gt;Value of diversity&lt;br&gt;Language bilingualism (due to future success or their ethnic backgrounds)&lt;br&gt;Value of play&lt;br&gt;Academic preparedness&lt;br&gt;Understanding of readiness&lt;br&gt;Ideas/understanding of school&lt;br&gt;Continuity&lt;br&gt;Quality&lt;br&gt;Social emotional development/skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Family needs | Scheduling  
|             | Location (close to work/home or public/community site)  
|             | Parent employment  
|             | Siblings  
|             | Cost/affordability  
|             | Transportation  
| Setting characteristics | Service for special needs  
|                      | Bilingual program  
|                      | Diversity  
|                      | Location  
|                      | Hours  
|                      | Ages  
|                      | Availability  
|                      | Staff  
|                      | Cost  
|                      | Curriculum  
| Child’s needs | Special needs and other needs  
|               | Language  
|               | Child readiness (academic or social)  
|               | Child capabilities  
| Structural/ procedural constraints | Information about 4K program  
|                       | Waitlist  
|                       | Enrollment process  
|                       | Offering  
| Resources | Cultural capital  
|           | Social capital  
|           | Flexibility of schedule  
|           | Transportation  
|           | Financial  
|           | Neighborhood  
|           | 4K searching  
| Prior, 4K, and Kindergarten experience | Kindergarten  
|                          | 4K  
|                          | 0-3 Childcare  
|                          | No-4K  

Prior, 4K, and Kindergarten experience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of 4K</th>
<th>School 4K</th>
<th>Head Start 4K</th>
<th>Childcare 4K</th>
<th>No-4K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Number of programs considered</td>
<td>Difficulty of the search process</td>
<td>Sources of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ experienced 4K program</td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C-1. New codes added for the interview and open-ended survey data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>New codes added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Thematized coding       | 1. Parent’s accommodations (e.g., choice of their 2nd option, use of social capital, and multiple arrangements)  
2. Priorities (e.g., familiar\textsuperscript{69}, structural,\textsuperscript{70} and process \textsuperscript{71} quality)  
3. Types of 4K (School 4K, Head Start 4K, Childcare 4K, No-4K)  
4. Processes (e.g., number of programs considered, difficulty of the search process, and the sources of information)  
5. Parents’ views on 4K program (e.g., opportunity, resistance, and struggle) |
| Initial coding          | 1. Recommendations for the district (e.g., Other facilities/programs, enrollment information, What is 4K?, 4K at public school sites, schedule, cost, transportation, pick up/ drop off, curriculum, and diversity/critical thinking)  
2. Parents’ accommodations (e.g., stay-at-home parent, hourly childcare, changes in work hours, and moving)  
3. Values/preferences (e.g., reputation of the school)  
4. Setting characteristics (e.g., location, bilingual program, service for special needs, and diversity)  
5. Structural/procedural constraints (e.g., information about 4K and waitlists)  
6. Resources (e.g., cultural capital\textsuperscript{72}). |

\textsuperscript{69} Familial quality includes the program’s distance from home/work, hours, cost, and families’ personal or value-based ideas of quality (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016, p. 128).  
\textsuperscript{70} Structural quality includes teacher qualification and adult-child ratio (Howes et al., 2008).  
\textsuperscript{71} Process quality includes effective teaching, teacher-child relationships, teacher-child interactions, and instructional methods (Howes et al., 2008).  
\textsuperscript{72} Cultural capital can include the following capital: Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. Familial capital is nurtured by our extended family, which include immediate family as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends. Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources. Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Resistant capital refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-80).