



Oakland Starting
Smart & Strong

ECECOSYSTEM PROJECT BRIEF



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Summary


The Oakland Unified School District Early Childhood Education Department ([OUSD ECE](#)) and Oakland Starting Smart and Strong ([OSSS](#)) have identified an opportunity for supporting Oakland families with young children as they organize and advocate for systems change in their communities – data collected using the Early Development Instrument ([EDI](#)). Oakland has a long history of progressive activism and people power. Many families have identified needs and solutions to improve their local early childhood systems (ECEcosystems) and are actively engaged in advocating for change or are on the verge of organizing.

The EDI is an internationally recognized research tool that provides a holistic, neighborhood-level view of how well systems are supporting incoming kindergarteners' health and wellbeing. This data has the potential to be an asset to community organizing efforts. However, currently, the EDI is not viewed as an organizing tool and the community does not feel that they have ownership over the data.

This document briefly describes the process for how OUSD ECE and OSSS supported community activism, through building a relationship with the [San Antonio Family Resource Center](#) Parent Action Research Team and developing [ECEcosystem Zone Profiles](#) to support their organizing and advocacy efforts. [Click here to jump to the Process Overview.](#)

Through this process, the OUSD ECE and OSSS team has identified six key learnings that they want to share with other early childhood advocates and stakeholders, discussed below. They include 1) Build Trust, 2) Create Space to Process Data, 3) Use Systems-Focused and Asset-Based Language, 4) Lift Up Community Narratives Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data, 5) Ensure Data is at the Service of Community, and 6) Always See Community as Experts and Partners. [Click here to jump to the 6 Key Learnings.](#)

While this entire process ([full process description here](#)) took more than a year, we recognize that building equitable partnerships and trust takes time, so a lengthy process is necessary; moving quickly has the potential to create more harm than good.



“ Our families in Oakland need to be safe and successful. We want our neighborhood to be safe and such a space that our kids are growing. -- Rajni Chauhan, Parent of 2 ”

Background

San Antonio Family Resource Center Parent Action Research Team (SAFRC PART)

The San Antonio Family Resource Center Parent Action Research Team was created through [First 5 of Alameda County's Neighborhoods Ready for School](#) (NFRS) initiative. NFRS is a “place-based initiative launched by First 5 Alameda County in 2018 to support equity and neighborhood-led investment, programming, and policy related to early childhood development, family health and well-being, and kindergarten readiness.” NFRS funded ALL IN Alameda County which partnered with Lotus Bloom, EBAYC, and Trybe to launch the [San Antonio Family Resource Center](#).

SAFRC PART is “a community of multicultural, multilingual parent leaders who live or work in the San Antonio neighborhood” that organizes “to improve neighborhood conditions, services and resources for families with young children” and “support the learning foundation of children from 0-5 who live in the San Antonio neighborhood.” SAFRC PART is made up of 14 parent leaders who are assisted by a veteran community organizer and a project manager (contracted by First 5 AC). Parent leaders are compensated for their time and work.

SAFRC PART facilitated listening sessions with over 60 families, both before and after Alameda County declared shelter-in-place orders on March 16, 2020. They engaged with twenty-five families before the shutdown. They asked families about how well the neighborhood was supporting them and their children. Through these listening sessions, they identified concerns and needs in the community and used them to create a set of recommendations. One of their recommendations is a full service community resource center in San Antonio Park. SAFRC PART submitted a proposal to the City after the City of Oakland's San Antonio Park Master Plan Team began holding community engagement meetings in January 2021 to hear community ideas and concerns about the park and the master plan.



Oakland Unified School District Early Childhood Education Department (OUSD ECE)


[OUSD ECE](#)'s main goal is “to provide each child with individual attention that is essential during the early years, an engaging curriculum and a safe, nurturing environment in which students thrive.” They have a vested interest in building “a solid foundation of success for all children and their families” as they believe that early childhood education (ECE) is a “catalyst to high student achievement” in future years. OUSD ECE believes that kindergarten readiness can only be achieved through “the combined efforts of families, the community and schools to come together and support [Oakland children’s] achievement both in the schools and in the community.” OUSD ECE has expressed a commitment to increasing universal access to high-quality early learning experiences that promote healthy development of all Oakland’s young children. They have dedicated a Research Associate to support this work; this position has been instrumental in the efforts detailed in this brief.

Oakland Starting Smart and Strong (OSSS)

[OSSS](#) is a collaborative made up of ECE stakeholders and community leaders with the overarching goal of creating “universal access to high-quality early learning experiences that promote healthy development, so that all kids are ready for kindergarten.” OSSS developed a 2020-21 policy agenda grounded in three equity areas: 1) systems change for Oakland’s youngest learners; 2) parent and family leadership in community investment; and, 3) equity for early childhood professionals and family-friend-neighbor caregivers. This agenda was established to “advocate for systems-building efforts to support children and families most impacted by racial and economic inequity” so they have access to opportunities that will help them realize their full potential. OSSS is fiscally sponsored by the Oakland Public Education Fund and receives funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Hellman Foundation, and the Rainin Foundation.

Early Development Instrument (EDI)

The [EDI](#) was developed at the Offord Center at McMaster University in Canada and “has been used for years in communities across the United States and Canada, and nationwide in Australia.” It is a research tool that provides communities with a snapshot of incoming kindergartener’s health and development at a neighborhood level, specifically in five domains (social competence, emotional maturity, language



& cognition, physical health & wellbeing, and community skills). The EDI has been “validated by over ten years of research in different educational settings,” however, one study done by Mousavi and Krishnan did conclude that “any group comparison for Communication and general knowledge domain should be interpreted with caution.”

EDI results are not reported for individual students or teachers as the tool is meant to help communities “understand the geographic patterns and societal conditions that are driving children’s developmental outcomes.” The results can be used to “look back and assess how the Oakland early childhood community can better prepare children for school” and “look forward to address the needs of students entering Kindergarten as they progress through school in OUSD.”

The EDI is administered every three years, starting in 2017, at OUSD school sites with the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and UCLA’s Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities. Kindergarten teachers fill out the EDI questionnaire on each of their students. Questionnaires representing 88% of OUSD kindergarteners were filled out for the 2016-17 school year and that percentage rose to 93% for the 2019-20 school year. The EDI will be administered again during the 2022-23 school year.

Currently, OUSD’s EDI results are housed on [a public interactive online data dashboard](#), developed with input from local stakeholders, and are shared through small group presentations facilitated by OUSD and/or OSSS. OUSD and OSSS has been using the data to advocate for local policy change and to inform community conversations with various stakeholders. Most recently, the data was shared with OUSD classroom teachers at a voluntary Early Childhood Data Summit in April of 2021. The data was presented by OUSD ECE and OUSD’s Department of English Language Arts.



Process Overview

Phase 1

This phase included building a relationship with SAFRC PART through data presentations, focus groups, and interviews. OUSD and OSSS presented EDI data to the parent leaders and facilitated discussions with them to analyze and interpret the data. OUSD and OSSS also asked for SAFRC PART's help to make the online dashboard more accessible. Finally, they interviewed two parent leaders to hear about their experiences in their neighborhood and get a deeper understanding of their thoughts on the EDI.

- EDI Presentation to SAFRC PART: 1/23/20
- EDI Presentation to SAFRC PART: 9/24/20
- EDI Online Dashboard SAFRC PART Focus Group: 12/15/20
- SAFRC PART Parent Leader Interviews: 2/2/21 and 2/3/21
- SAFRC PART Community Organizer One-On-One Meeting: 3/16/21

Phase 2

SAFRC PART conducted family listening sessions and had identified the need for a full-service resource center. OSSS and OUSD wanted to support and uplift SAFRC PART's experiences and advocacy so they created ECEcosystem Neighborhood Profiles based on the experiences that SAFRC PART had shared, and the San Antonio Park vision statement. These draft profiles were then shared with SAFRC PART so their feedback could shape them, to ensure the data was valid and relevant to the parent leaders. Finally, OSSS and OUSD shared the profiles and this entire process with early childhood advocates/partners to get their feedback.

- Developed draft [ECEcosystem Profiles](#): April 2020
- EDI Follow-Up and ECEcosystem Profile SAFRC PART Meeting: 5/27/21
- OSSS Data Committee and ECE Partner Special Session: 6/14/21

- Read the [full, detailed process description here](#).



Key Learnings

As the OUSD ECE and OSSS team reflected on this process and the relationship they have built with SAFRC PART, they identified six key learnings that they want to share with other early childhood organizations, advocates, and stakeholders.

Build Trust


A key part of this process was creating space for researchers and early childhood advocates from outside of the community to listen to the experts, families. Every meeting and presentation was seen as an opportunity to learn from parent leaders about their experiences, their interpretation of the data, and their feedback on the research tool itself. We recognize that data about the community should be owned by the community; it is their data to validate, refute, and analyze. All meetings were an opportunity for collaboration and learning on both sides. We viewed each other as partners and put in the time and effort to build a trusting relationship. We recognize the need to have trusting relationships with the community first and we do not expect the community to come to the table if trust hasn't been established.

Create Space to Process Data

It was important to create space for everyone to feel all the emotions they had about data collected from their own community-- how they felt about the data and whether they thought it was valid. This meant multiple opportunities to engage with the data so they had ample time to process their emotions and thoughts. We recognize the need to make room for disappointment, create opportunities for healing, as well as space for critical feedback and concerns.

Use Systems-Focused and Asset-Based Language

While listening to the feedback and concerns of the community, we were able to reflect on our biases as researchers and advocates. Parent leaders and community/ECE stakeholders shared their frustration that the language we used when talking about the EDI tool and presenting the EDI data were sometimes contradictory. They were told that the EDI results were a reflection of how systems were doing but then we used language centered on children, not systems (i.e. X% of children are vulnerable or X% of children are on track). They also shared concerns that language like "vulnerable" or "not ready for school" was not asset-based. We then adjusted our language to "X% of children are fully supported" and we further refined this language with more feedback



from the community to “X% of children were fully supported by the ECEcosystem.” We are now exploring how we can be more systems-focused and asset-based, in the presentation of the data and also within the data tool itself.

“ The people here, they live together, they work with each other, and they uplift each other.

-- Rajni Chauhan, Parent of 2 ”

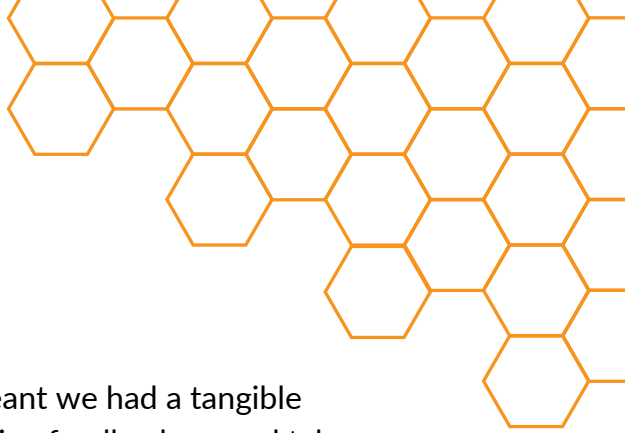
Lift Up Community Narratives Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The community has an important and intimate story to tell about their neighborhood. As we listened to parent leaders, we heard them talk about what they love about their neighborhood and assets in the community. From that point, they discussed what they were losing out on when ECEcosystems failed to meet their community’s needs. The community narrative is much more comprehensive and nuanced than the story the EDI was telling by itself. Community narratives provide a more holistic view of the ECEcosystem, a complexity that is highly needed yet often left out. We used quantitative data from various sources to support the rich stories that were shared with us. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, we are able to lift up a fuller narrative about the ECEcosystem, as told by the community, and support practical and sustainable solutions that are grounded in lived experience.

Ensure Data is at the Service of Community

SAFRC PART had the perspective, experiences, and relationships needed to facilitate listening sessions with families in the San Antonio neighborhood. Through these listening sessions they identified local strengths and needs and were able to determine where the ECEcosystem was failing young children and their families. SAFRC PART members had the lived experience and the qualitative data to tell their community’s story. This allowed them to also identify sustainable and practical solutions, such as the San Antonio Park full-service resource center.

This created the opportunity for data to be at the service of the community, if and when they wanted it. Thanks to the relationship we had built with one another, we were able to create [ECEcosystem zone profiles](#) that lifted up SAFRC PART’s experiences and solutions. The zone profiles used data to back up the community’s



experiences and what they were asking for. This also meant we had a tangible deliverable to share with SAFRC PART that they could give feedback on and take ownership of. They could refute or validate the data in these profiles and then decide if they wanted to use it and how they wanted to use it.

As researchers and advocates who do not live in the San Antonio neighborhood and/or are not closely connected with San Antonio families, we are not the ones to tell the community's story nor are we the ones to identify solutions. We followed the community's lead and located opportunities where we could provide technical assistance and/or create something that might be useful to their advocacy efforts.



You don't see enough resources as far as food, gas, especially places for our children to go. They are our future. They need somewhere to go and play. And it is good for parents because they get to meet who's in their community. So I think it's very important that we need to improve that.



-- Yolanda Monroe, Parent of 2

Always See Community as Experts and Partners

It is vital that we always see the community as experts and partners. We recognize that data about the community should be owned by the community; it is their community and their data. They have the right to validate, refute, and analyze it. SAFRC PART provided us with critical feedback on the EDI; both on the EDI results and on the research tool itself. Their feedback helped us think more deeply about how we could use our power and proximity to power to advocate for ECE data and research tools to be more equitable and antiracist. Their feedback allowed us to make important changes to how we present data and we are also currently advocating for their suggested changes to be made to the EDI tool itself.

Questions to Consider Moving Forward

- How can we make this process more community-led/-driven?
- How do we ensure this process remains community-focused and community-led and is not co-opted into a more “top-down” approach?
- How can we use this process to inform work where families are not already organized the way SAFRC PART was/is?
- Are there opportunities for this process to be replicated? Other communities and/or community-led organizations that could benefit from this same process?



Acknowledgements

We thank SAFRC PART for their hard work and dedication to improving the ECEcosystem for young children and their families in the San Antonio neighborhood; we are incredibly honored to be in partnership with an amazing group of parent leaders. And we look forward to using our imaginations in our roles as advocates and researchers as we think about how data can truly be in service to community-led systems change, if and when communities want it.

If you'd like to connect with us and learn more about this project or review the EDI results for your community together, please [request a presentation](#) or email Trisha Barua (trisha@oaklandsmartandstrong.org).





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Questions & Information

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