

PASO A PASO NETWORK
*Step by Step for Family Health in Taos
and Western Colfax Counties*

Paso a Paso Network Early Childhood Community Needs Assessment

September 2022



PASO A PASO
N E T W O R K

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Paso a Paso Network's Community Needs Assessment

INTRODUCTION

"Our children are our future. Teach them at home and in the classroom."

– Taos Pueblo Cacique

OUR STORY

The Paso a Paso Network brings together people and organizations serving children and families in Taos County. Twenty years ago, regional early childhood professionals began meeting informally to share information about services and build regional capacity. Recognizing that a strong start for all kids can lead to better outcomes, the group focused on early childhood as a vehicle for the creation of a healthier, more prosperous, and equitable community. Paso acknowledged that organizations were acting within silos and were competing against each other for limited funds resulting in duplication in some cases and service gaps in others. To better serve families, a more collaborative approach was needed, and they began to act.

The group's first efforts were to bring home visiting services to the region, and, at the inception of New Mexico Pre-K, advocate at the state level for a system that incorporated local community child care settings as well as public schools to provide Pre-K services. In 2007, with funding from HRSA's Office of Rural Health Policy, the Paso a Paso Network formalized, using a non-hierarchical structure and processes designed to share resources and training, improve communication, and pursue systems-building opportunities collaboratively and equitably. The Network has been meeting monthly and operating under those processes ever since. Current membership includes 27 community organizations and individuals representing health and behavioral health, family support services, early childhood education and care, and special needs and early intervention.

OUR VISION AND MISSION

The Paso a Paso Network envisions *that children in Taos County will live in an environment that promotes optimum health and development, with parents who are able to support, guide and advocate for them in a culture of community collaboration.*

Paso a Paso Network (Paso) integrates organizations into stronger, more flexible and effective structures by merging resources and systems to advance a collective mission. The result is improved efficiency among organizations and greater access, availability and quality of services for families with young children, from prenatal stage to age 8 in Taos and western Colfax Counties.

OUR HOW AND WHY

Paso members extend beyond their organizational walls to work in alliances that thrive on shared strengths, producing systems that benefit both clients and partner organizations so that all Taos County children and families thrive. Paso members provide services to hundreds of families yearly; the network supports and connects these providers. We understand that this is only possible when the systems involving young children and their families are highly functioning. Together, we must address the root causes of disparities and create an equitable and cohesive early childhood development support system for expecting families, infants and toddlers, and the communities in which they live.

The Paso a Paso Network initiatives help professionals develop innovative programs, improve practices, recruit and build the workforce, advocate for resources, and educate the community on the importance of the early years. The Network focuses on collaborative community action, in ad-hoc workgroups and standing committees. The Paso a Paso Network uplifts member organizations within a flat model and is noncompetitive in nature. Members identify needs and/or opportunities form working groups, catalyze projects, document progress and change, and when necessary, work to sustain a program within a member organization.

THE PASO A PASO NETWORK

Current membership includes 27 community organizations and individuals representing health and behavioral health, family support services, early childhood education and care, special needs and early intervention, and community members.

Network Partners:

[Anansi Charter School](#)

[Anansi Day School](#)

[COAD/Dream Tree](#)

[Community Against Violence](#)

EnSueños Y Los Angelitos Development Center
Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood
Golden Willow Counseling
Holy Cross Hospital / First Steps Home Visiting / ROAMS Project / Children's Trust Fund / Taos Loves Kids
Honu Consulting, LLC
INSPIRE Bilingual Early Learning Center
NM-RECA & SW Regional Education Cooperative
Red River Chamber of Commerce
Silver Bear Behavioral Health
Taos Alive
Taos Behavioral Health
Taos Community Foundation
Taos Municipal Schools / Enos Garcia Nurturing Center
Taos Public Library
Taos Pueblo Division of Health and Community Services / Tiwa Babies
Taos Pueblo Head Start & Early Head Start
Twirl Play & Discovery Space
UNICEF USA
UNM-Taos Early Childhood Education & Development Teacher Residency Program
UNM-Taos Kids' Campus Center for Early Learning
YDI Head Start & Early Head Start
Youth Heartline

Current work groups/committees include Taos Early Childhood Alliance (TECA) (early education), Imagination Library (early literacy), Partnering in Children's Success Family Leadership, Shared Professional Development (for Network members and the community), Policy and Communication Committee, Early Learning Transition Committee (supporting transitions from schools and programs), and external, interconnecting committees; Pueblo Early Learning Committee, and the 100% Community Initiative-Early Childhood (cross sector initiative to stop adverse childhood events [ACEs] and the consequences of early trauma).

SYSTEMS BUILDING PROJECT

In November 2021, Paso a Paso Network submitted a proposal for and subsequently received funding through the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) for the Local Early Childhood Systems Building Grant (LECSBG) FY 2022-2024. LECSBG, made possible by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation (CRSSA) Act, will distribute \$5.4 million in funding over FY22-24 to grow the capacity of early childhood coalitions across the state.



ECECD aims to create more cohesive, equitable, and effective early childhood systems in New Mexico and this initiative is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Objective 1c - Increase parent and caregiver awareness of early childhood services;
- Objective 2c - Strengthen partnerships at the state and local levels to effectively use all available resources across the mixed-delivery system; and
- Objective 4a - Maximize and leverage all possible funding.

The project has set clear deliverables to create family, community, and data driven plans to address inequities and other

systems barriers that limit families from accessing services and supports that help children grow and thrive. This Needs Assessment is the first step in the planning process.

Paso a Paso's Needs Assessment paired family and provider input with local and state level data to provide a basis to help the Network identify opportunity areas to strengthen and inform strategic goals. Family voice, community engagement, membership engagement, and equity were top priorities during the implementation of the Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment is also timely with the Constitutional Amendment 1, Land Grant Permanent Distribution for Early Childhood Education Amendment on the ballot in November 2022¹; and state appropriations addressing the Martinez/Yazzie v. New Mexico court decision.²

Child care infrastructure and early childhood system needs are at the epicenter of current economic recovery, educational equity, and social justice in a field where the workforce is predominantly women of color. Having a deep, data-informed understanding of the field's impact, availability, affordability, efficacy, and workforce needs is necessary to inform advocacy and planning. The Needs Assessment can be utilized as a tool for advocacy, policy change, and systems change so all families – and early childhood programs and professionals – in our county, and in our state, can thrive.

¹ <https://www.nmvoices.org/permanentschoolfund>

² <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Handouts/ALFC%20061522%20Item%208%20TAB%20-%20C.pdf>

METHODOLOGY

The Paso a Paso Network conducted a mixed methods approach of quantitative and qualitative data collection focused on gathering information about families with children ages 8 and younger with a strong interest in families with children ages 5 and under. The stakeholder groups surveyed and interviewed were parents, community partners, and Network membership. The interviews were analyzed using the Grounded Theory Approach where responses were reviewed and coded multiple times, allowing for themes to emerge.

SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Guided by the template provided by the UNM Family Development Program, a variety of secondary data were gathered from publicly accessible databases, including the U.S. Census, the Kids Count Data Center, and the NM Department of Health. A list of New Mexico early childhood programs was provided from the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD). This database was used to compile indicators on Taos County early childhood programs. The 2022 Town of Taos Comprehensive Plan was also referenced to highlight economic data.

PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

All Network members were asked to complete a short survey in August 2022. Members were provided the questions via email and were also provided an opportunity to have an online meeting to discuss their responses if preferred. Nineteen of the 52 coalition members completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 37%. The responses of the questionnaire were used in system analysis to identify assets, gaps, and needs in the early childhood system locally. See Appendix A for the questions included in the survey.

Listening sessions were facilitated with Network membership utilizing an appreciative inquiry method to identify strengths and discover opportunities to create a more equitable early childhood system. See Appendix B for the listening session questions and prompts. The size of each session allowed for deep conversations:

- July 26, virtual via Google Meet: 5 Network participants
- August 3, virtual via Google Meet: 7 Network participants
- August 5, virtual via Google Meet: 2 Network participants

Interviews were conducted with parents and caregivers during in-person Taos County events, and data was collected from July 2022-August 2022. Respondents were randomly selected and a total of 120 interviews were completed. See Appendix C for the interview questions. Below is a list of participant numbers during each event:

- July 27, Community Day at the Town of Taos's Movies on the Green: 49 interviews
- August 27, Town of Taos Touch-A-Truck Event: 56 interviews
- August 28, Questa Farmer's Market: 15 interviews

Two family dialogue circles were conducted with parent and caregiver participants with 18 participants. See Appendix D for the family dialogue circle agenda. To allow for more in-depth information, each session was designed to have a maximum of a dozen participants:

- August 5, Imagine Children’s Museum: 12 participants
- August 9, virtual via Google Meet: 6 participants

In total, more than 171 people contributed their input to this early childhood Needs Assessment with the Paso a Paso Network. Although demographic information was not collected during the interviews or surveys, based on interviewers’ assumptions, respondents represented the rich diversity of Taos County from geographic location, type of caregiving, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, ability, etc. All data was used in this analysis to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities impacting the early childhood programs, services, and community needs and findings are summarized at the end of this document.

LIMITATIONS

Data categorization is presented as collected by the source (e.g., U.S. Census, Kids Count Databook, etc.).

- Consequently, data is reported as collected, which results in accuracy limitations regarding the labeling of data, such as race and ethnicity, etc.
- Family participation was self-selected, therefore families less engaged and isolated were not fully captured.
- Similar limitations exist related to hetero-normative assumptions of family composition.
- There is danger in assuming an available early care and education services capacity, slot, or space correlates with a child.
- This also does not reflect the range of other early childhood services or out-of-system options for child care, including care by a family member, on which many families rely.
- There is the need for ECECD to provide disaggregated data by race and ethnicity on early care and learning indicators.
- Certain data has been captured in a “monthly snap” and other data is annual or cumulative.
- Acknowledgement that data is not objective. Data, even quantitative data, is not neutral, objective, or free of bias.³

³ <https://libguides.umn.edu/c.php?g=1096139&p=7993780#s-lg-box-wrapper-31763246>



IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Inequities begin at birth and the impact lasts a lifetime. A child's brain develops faster from birth to age 5 than at any other time in their lives. Equitably invest in children in their first five years, and you can change everything.

Quality Early Childhood Programs Work

Decades of research have proven that quality early learning and care programs are a smart investment. Economist James Heckman has demonstrated that early interventions can break the cycle of poverty for multiple generations. Parents experience better outcomes, and their children experience better outcomes. Then, when those children become adults, their children also experience better outcomes. For every dollar invested in early childhood programs, society yields a \$6.30 return, improving education, employment and health outcomes and saving on later remediation costs.⁴

Children Who Experience Quality Early Learning and Care Programs:

- Are 25% more likely to graduate high school.⁵
- Are 4x more likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher.⁶
- Earn up to 25% more in wages as an adult.⁷

⁴ <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/faq-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>

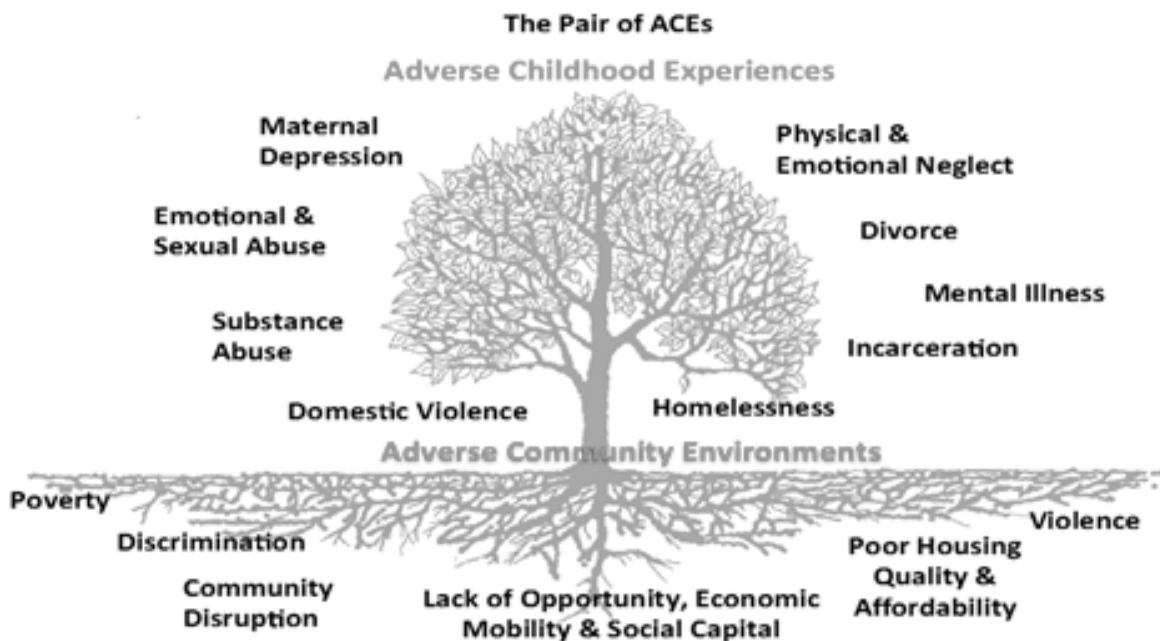
⁵ <https://highscope.org/perry-preschool-project/>

⁶ https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/snapshots/FPG_Snapshot66_2012.pdf

⁷ <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-the-jamaican-study/>

The early years really matter when it comes to lifelong health

The connection between experiencing significant adversity or trauma early in life and being at greater risk for diminished well-being into the adult years is well documented by extensive research.⁸ In addition to the widely known effects of excessive stress in the early childhood period on school readiness, educational achievement, later economic productivity, and strong communities, it also can lead to higher rates of chronic physical and mental health problems across the lifespan.⁹ More important, most adverse early experiences, exposures, and conditions are preventable. The existing science is clear and pushes us toward fresh thinking about how to reduce the substantial human and economic costs of significant adversity early in life.



Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. *Academic Pediatrics*, 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011

Some population groups, such as families with young children, experience distinctive challenges in life. Adding to the sources of stress felt by all caregivers, many families of color experience other substantial burdens that may include unequal treatment in health care, education, child welfare, and justice systems; entrenched barriers to economic advancement; and frequent indignities resulting from cultural racism. Yet these stress-inducing experiences are not inevitable.¹⁰ Early childhood systems have the opportunity to support families and connect them to resources to help them thrive.

⁸ Boyce, W., Levitt, P., Martinez, F., McEwen, B., Shonkoff, J. (2021). Genes, Environments, and Time: The Biology of Adversity and Resilience. *Pediatrics*, 147(2), e20201651. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-1651>

⁹ www.developingchild.harvard.edu

¹⁰ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/moving-upstream-confrontingracism-to-open-up-childrens-potential/>

ASSESSMENT

TAOS COUNTY PROFILE

Paso a Paso Network Land Acknowledgement

Paso a Paso Network member organizations are located on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, New Mexico is home to 23 federally recognized Tribes, with Taos being on the traditional homelands to the Red Willow People within the original territory of Taos Pueblo. Paso a Paso Network respectfully acknowledges the original inhabitants of these lands of which we live, work, and benefit from; and recognizes that they still reside in the area and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We honor the impact of their wisdom, generosity, and sacrifice since time immemorial. We pay our respects to them and their culture; and to Elders both past and present.

We recognize that these ancestors have experienced colonization, genocide, disease, and war. We also acknowledge the extraction of brilliance, energy and life for labor forced upon millions of people of African descent for more than 400 years.



Demographics | Taos County

Table 1: Taos County Demographics

Taos County ¹¹			
Total Population	32,759	Children Population	
Population disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity		Total Ages 0-19	6,041
Hispanic Population	18,621	Children Population disaggregated by Age	
Non-Hispanic White	11,573	Ages 0-4	1,333
Native American	1,767	Ages 5-9	2,054
Black or African American	82	Ages 10-14	1,336
Asian	248	Ages 15-19	1,678
Native Hawaiian	3	Children Population ages 0-4 disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity	
Some Other Race	101	Hispanic	1,084
Two or More Races	364	Non-Hispanic White	158
Picuris Pueblo Population	2,288	Native American	104
Taos Pueblo Population	5,122	Black or African American	5
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years + 2016-2020	40.50%	Asian	0
		Native Hawaiian	0
		Some Other Race	10
		Two or More Races	337

Taos County includes the communities of Taos, Red River, Questa, Peñasco, Taos Ski Valley, Amalia, Arroyo Hondo, Arroyo Seco, Chamisal, Costilla, Ojo Caliente, Picuris Pueblo, Ranchos de Taos, San Cristobal, Talpa, Taos Pueblo, Tres Piedras, Vadito, Valle Escondido, and more small villages. The County totals 2,202 square miles. There is a 15.7 population per square mile.¹²

¹¹ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5066-total-population-by-race-and-ethnicity?loc=33&loct=5#detailed/5/4844/false/574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/4827,4828,4900,4901,4902,4888,4887,4903/18223,11514>

¹² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/taoscountynewmexico>

EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

“Caregiving is the most important work we can do in our life.” Angela Garbes

Taos County Overview

Number of licensed or registered home child care providers

1 licensed family home, with capacity to serve: 6
4 registered homes, with capacity to serve: 16

Number of licensed child care centers

6 child care centers, with capacity to serve: 268
Including 3 Pre-K contractors, capacity to serve 96

NM Public Education Department Pre-K

4 districts, School Year 21-22 Enrollment, Taos County: 104

Number of Head Start and Early Head Start Centers

5 Head Start centers, 3 Early Head Start Centers, with capacity to serve: 164
1 Tribal Head Start, 1 Tribal Early Head Start, with capacity to serve: 50

Percentage of young children (ages 3-4) enrolled in preschool, in Taos County: 85.5%

Total early learning and care capacity: 608

Capacity to serve Taos County’s children ages 0-4, percentage: 45.6%

Waiting Lists for Early Care and Learning Centers

Licensed child care centers, infants: 13
Licensed child care centers, infants/toddlers: 146
Licensed child care centers, Pre-k: 87
Head Start, infants/toddlers: 2
Head Start, Pre-k: 4
Tribal Head Start, infants/toddlers: 8

Waiting Lists totals for Early Care and Learning Centers

Infants: 13

Infants/toddlers: 156

Pre-k: 91

Waiting lists totals for children ages 0-4: 260

Waiting lists totals for children ages 0-4, percentage: 19.5%

Home Visiting Programs

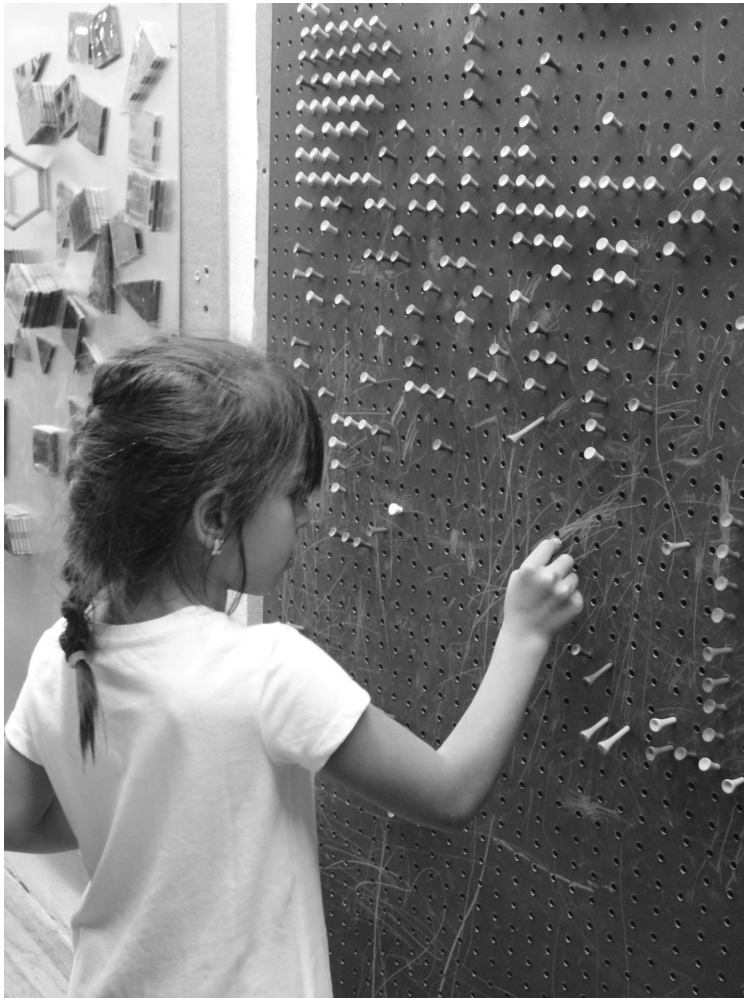
Children served by 3 home visiting programs, annually: 192
Percentage of children ages 0-4 served by home visiting in Taos County: 14.4%

Family Infant Toddler Program

Ensueños y los Angelitos, capacity to serve: 149

There is currently a void with the only licensed special needs and early intervention service located in Taos, experiencing vacancies at all programmatic levels: Director, 3 Developmental Specialists, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, 3 Family Services Coordinators.

- **87 children and families currently waiting for services, as referrals are received and continued departmental vacancies**



Key informant interviews revealed there is a lack of and need for infant and toddler care; and there is an overwhelming need for more quality care and unconventional care that is provided after work hours or after school. It must be noted that this data also does not reflect the range of other early childhood services or out-of-system options for child care, including care by a family member, on which many Taos County families rely. This information is difficult to collect. The Network was awarded a grant in 2019 to create a network of home care providers, and initially hosted 12 participants during a training to *Grow Your Own Home Child Care*. The Paso a Paso Network found that most home based care providers were reluctant to join peer groups, preferring to remain under the radar.

STATE AND FEDERAL FAMILY SUPPORTS

Child care Assistance

Children receiving child care assistance subsidies, in New Mexico: 13,151

Percentage of children: 11.42%

The Child Care Assistance Program subsidizes the cost of child care for families at or below 400% of the federal poverty level (\$111,000 a year for a family of four) that are working, in school, or searching for employment. The NM ECECD will waive child care assistance copayments for any family that qualifies for the program.

New Mexico Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program¹³

Average number of children currently served with WIC services, monthly: 588

Percentage of children served with WIC services ages 0-4: 44.1%

Child and Adult Care Food Program, Taos County

Average daily attendance: 159

Meal counts annual total: 26,966

Summer Food Service Program, Taos County

2 sponsors, 9 meal sites

Meal counts annual total: 301,279

Average total participation: 14,264

HEALTH

Births and Rural OB Access and Maternal Services, Taos County

Total births: 121

Total ROAMs Family Navigator Assistance Program, clients served in FY22: 132

Total breastfeeding support, clients served: 122, including 288 visits

Percentage of clients served with breastfeeding support per total births: 60%

Percent of infants born with low birthweight: 11.3%

Reported child abuse and neglect rate: 27.4 per 1,000 population

Number of children born to substance using mothers¹⁴: 33.3 per 1,000 live births

Primary Care Physicians Full-Time Equivalent: 7.3 per 10,000 population

Kindergarteners who were up-to-date with required school vaccinations¹⁵: 78.8%

Percent of children under age 6 who are covered by health insurance¹⁶: 98.5%

WORKFORCE

New Mexico Statistics¹⁷

Child care worker, median wage: \$10.00/hour

Preschool teacher, median wage: \$13.66/hour

Center director, median wage: \$24.69/hour

Kindergarten teacher, median wage: \$29.44/hour

Elementary teacher, median wage: \$31.78/hour

All workers, median wage: \$17.03/hour

¹³ Source: Northeast Region WIC Manager, Note: This does not include Tribal WIC participants

¹⁴ Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, Source: Syndromic Surveillance Epidemiology Program, NM Department of Health

¹⁵ <https://www.nmhealth.org/data/view/report/2664/>

¹⁶ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Health%20Insurance&g=0500000US35055&tid=ACST5Y2020.S2701>

¹⁷ Source: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/new-mexico/>

Local Workforce Development Programs

University of New Mexico-Taos: Early Childhood Education and Development associate degree program

New Mexico early educators with a bachelor's degree are paid 50.6 percent less than their colleagues in the K-8 system. The poverty rate for early educators in New Mexico is 27.4 percent, much higher than for New Mexico workers in general (12.7 percent) and 6.8 times as high as for K-8 teachers (4.1 percent).¹⁸

KEY FINDINGS

- There is capacity to serve 45.6% of children ages 0-4 in Taos County in established early care and learning centers. This data is based on maximum licensed and registered capacity of child care providers, not actual enrollment rates.
- Percentage of young children (ages 3-4) enrolled in preschool, in Taos County: 85.5%
- Gap in services without capacity at Ensueños y los Angelitos FIT program.
- A low percentage of families engage in home visiting programs.
- Taos County hosts many supports for families with young children, from home visiting, early care and learning, WIC, food programs, ROAMs navigation services, and several opportunities for points of engagement and referrals.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

During the Needs Assessment, families were interviewed and asked three concise questions to gather information about assets, challenges, and future visions. These interviews and data compiled from the family dialogue circles that focused on hopes and dreams, community vision, strengths, needs, and gaps, were combined in the findings. The Needs Assessment offered the opportunity to center family voice, while not only focusing on deficits, but also envisioning what the Taos community could look like, where all of our youngest children are thriving and have opportunities to reach their full potential.

Four themes emerged from family responses on the strengths and assets of raising children in Taos;

- Interconnected community and sense of community that is supportive, and communities come together for the good of the children.
- Parents and caregivers reported that the close proximity to other family members and family support and help is crucial to caregiving.
- Access to the outdoors, to mountains, camping, hiking, is central to overall health and well-being.
- Families spoke of the many Town of Taos hosted family events such as Movies on the Green, Touch-A-Truck, Art events, Holiday celebrations, and others like Taos Plaza Live.

¹⁸ Source: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/new-mexico/>

in Taos is the fact that I can live near my Mom and Auntie."

Theme 3: Outdoors

- *"So many fun outdoor things that I can do with my kids from hiking in the mountains, fishing, to just being in nature that a lot of other places don't have."*

Theme 4: Events

- *"Little league and other events at the park like Movies on the Green or Taos Plaza Live, and large community events are such a good time to get my little ones out with other people."*

2. What makes it hard or challenging?

Theme 1: "Not enough"

- *"Not enough activities to do from day to day with the baby and not enough child care options . . . not enough spaces for kids to grow and have fun."*

Theme 2: Child care

- *"Child care, wouldn't know what I would have done without a lot of family around to help out with both of us working."*

Theme 3: Care

- *"There's a huge lack of child care for infants and toddlers here, during the pandemic it was hard to be isolated without any support or care."*

Theme 4: Unaffordable

- *"Affordability . . . a lot of parents cannot afford rent, and child care, and then activities that are pay to play. It's not fair that they have to choose."*

3. If you had a magic wand and could change one thing – one person, program, service, or resource – about parenting/caregiving in Taos County, what would it be?

Theme 1: Care supports

- *"More flexibility for parents who work and support to take care of kids between out of school or child care and work hours, more programs and opportunities for young children."*

Theme 2: More activities

- *"A better effort for more activities for babies and toddlers, more activities for young families to connect with each other."*

Theme 3: Community spaces

- *"Opportunities for health and wellness in indoor community spaces and integrated services in those spaces."*

Theme 4: Health care

- *"The health care and hospital, and the dentist. My child broke a tooth and I was unable to get an appointment to fix it here, so we had to travel to Santa Fe to get it*

pulled. I couldn't afford the time, the gas, and had to take both of my kids somehow. I needed help."



NETWORK MEMBER'S INPUT

"Acknowledging and celebrating the Paso a Paso Network with all that has been and done, with the leadership and groundbreaking work that set the foundation for early childhood coalition work in New Mexico. At the same time, building upon the history and being willing to innovate and understanding the role that Paso a Paso can play now – what is the need among providers, professionals, and community that we can aim to fulfill?" — Network member

The Needs Assessment is an opportunity to work towards the rebuilding and envisioning of early childhood systems in Taos County. There is the need to work towards a more stable infrastructure with predictable funding, to enable more resources into providing supports for families instead of half of the resources going into trying to keep afloat. For families experiencing structural inequities, from generations to generations, reviewing and analyzing the way certain structures and policies disadvantage some groups than others. It's two-fold in assessing the early care and learning landscape and moving upstream to understand the unequal hardships, burdens, and threats on early childhood professionals, and families raising young children.

During the Needs Assessment, Network members were asked questions to gather information on challenges, strengths, opportunities, and collective action. These surveys and data compiled from the listening sessions were combined in the findings. The Needs Assessment offered the opportunity to emphasize Network members that work directly with families with young children or oversee programs impacting families. The focus was on systems analysis and collective action moving forward.

Results from Network members' responses on the challenges experienced by early childhood professionals were categorized into the following four themes:

- Staffing, retention, and capacity to ensure a stable workforce that adequately serves the needs of families and also inspires the next generation of early childhood professionals.
- Funding limitations that do not allow for our programs and services to be flexible to best meet the needs of our clients and limits our ability to be innovative and creative.
- External stressors such as low wages, high cost of living, health care systems, and unmet basic needs impact families' ability to access and engage in services.
- Stigma, shame, and perceptions sway families' beliefs and involvement in early childhood systems.

The Network identified additional areas that could strengthen support services and programs for families with young children, the four areas include:

- The early childhood workforce is underpaid and experiences lower wages than other educators.
- Comprehensive and collaborative early childhood system that involves the full spectrum of family services such as health care, mental health, child care, schools, job training, substance use disorder supports, and housing agencies.
- Network members and families alike, spoke of a central resource center for all of the early childhood programs and services across the spectrum that serves as the connector for all sectors.
- As an established coalition, there are long standing partnerships and assets, and leveraging coordination to work towards moving the needle on goals.

Lastly, while centering systems building analysis, Network members envisioned how to best work collectively to support overall childhood well-being in the Taos community, Network members identified four key themes:

- Turnover and burnout is an issue for the early childhood workforce, as well as structural issues such as wages, funding, and policies that negatively impact the health of an organization.
- Improved community awareness of programs and services as well as consistent and continual communications across sectors.
- Sharing in a common equity focused mission, vision, and goals to make impactful systems change and population level change.
- Leverage coordination and implement proven solutions which requires coordination and partnership among agencies, organizations providing programming, and families to work towards better outcomes for families with young children.

Table 3: Questions and Responses from Network Members

Questions	Answers
<p>1. What challenges might come your way in your work and how might you meet them to best serve families with young children?</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Staffing, retention, and capacity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Staffing and workforce, continue to build the workforce; maintaining staff retention and instituting professional development days to focus on high quality curriculum and reflection and collaborate.”</i> <p><u>Theme 2: Financial limitations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“The family stressors with lack of housing, transportation, basic needs aren't met by a family and instituting case management based off of need; cannot case manage because of funding limitations; have to do other projects like data collection and evaluation.”</i> <p><u>Theme 3: Stressors on families</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Families are stressed, finances are even more tenuous, pediatric services for mental and physical health need to be more accessible, fund to bring the system of support for families to the community school model.”</i> <p><u>Theme 4: Perceptions of early childhood systems</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“The biggest challenges is believing that the only reason you engage in our services is because something isn't working. I am working hard and doing a lot of outreach to connect with the community and change that way of thinking. Explaining that our services are for anyone who would like to gain more tools to support the children/kin/grandchildren they are connected to.”</i>
<p>2. What would strengthen your work to best serve families with young children?</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Pay parity for early childhood professionals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Pay early childhood teachers and staff more. Equity and economic strain is the bigger issue and obstacle.”</i> <p><u>Theme 2: Community resources for holistic support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It is important to look holistically at the needs of families and children. The well-being of our children cannot be adequately addressed without looking deeply at how to meet the needs of the whole family.”</i> <p><u>Theme 3: Central hub</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Central location or place to access for parent and child support, which then also includes support for early childhood professionals.”</i> <p><u>Theme 4: Leveraging the system and assets that exist</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Support participation of employees and administrators in participating in Paso a Paso as part of each work plan – working towards an equitable model that includes teachers, administrators, community members.”</i>

3. How should we conduct our work together in order to enable you/your organization's best contributions to our collective success for overall early childhood well-being in the Taos community?

Theme 1: Ensure each organization is healthy

- *"We should work to make sure each organization is in a healthy state so they can best serve the community- such in the case of Los Angelitos presently being understaffed; and We need to connect with organizations, companies, and groups who work affects early childhood, such as the Blue Bus, Kit Carson Electric, pediatricians."*

Theme 2: Communications, networking, and inclusion

- *"Working together by learning/understanding truly what each offer. How to connect to services. The most important part is creating relationships with each other to better support the community. Valuing what we each bring to the table. Giving agencies the opportunity to be a part of trainings. Being inclusive of all who are a part of this organization."*

Theme 3: Common value

- *"I believe a common value around the continuum of care for families would be very helpful. If we are able to adjust our mindset to a "strengths-based" perspective where every family receives parenting support (home visiting, family navigation/case management and parenting classes) on the continuum of prenatal care, pediatric care, preschool, elementary school, etc..., families will have 100% access to services in our community."*

Theme 4: Leverage coordination

- *"Develop a joint plan to maximize resources and knowledge. Coordinated effort to stay in touch with the community and pulling in the families to guide our work to understand the direction that's benefiting them and not what programs think."*
-

COMMUNITY ASSETS AND RESILIENCE

The Network believes that before recommendations are put forth, there is a need to take stock of the current assets. To inform the membership's work, the partners identified local assets or bright spots within various sectors that support families with young children and/or connect families. (It is assumed that all Network members are included in the "Variety of early childhood programming" or "Non-profits serving youth and families.")

Table 4: Taos' Community Assets for Young Children and Families

Physical spaces	Organizations	People	Traditions and Policies	
Mountains	Parenting programs	Holy Cross Hospital	Social-emotional catalysts	Rich heritage
Rivers	Family navigation	OBGYN	Active, tenacious professionals	Diverse cultures and traditions
Parks and playgrounds	Variety of early childhood programming	Dental care	Caring, dedicated professionals supporting families with young children	100% Community Initiative and resolution
Green space	Small business owners	IHS	Elected officials involved in community	Action oriented to address inequities, housing
Taos Youth and Family Center	Chamber of Commerce, business support	Substance use disorder programming, supports	Land based stewards	Collaborative partnerships across sectors and industries
University of New Mexico-Taos	Pediatricians	WIC	Religious leaders	Leadership and capacity building with early childhood professionals
Taos Center for the Arts	Food distribution	RTD	Individuals come together to share their gifts and specializations	Community care for children and education
Taos Pueblo	Town of Taos family events	Taos Community Foundation	Diverse, global individuals	Extended family involvement
Taos Ski Valley	Young people programming	Variety of schools, Taos Municipal Schools, community schools	Community volunteers	Close knit community
Farms	Taos Library	Taos Community Foundation	Local entrepreneurs	Paso a Paso Network involvement in community for 20 years

Federally qualified health centers	Twirl	Access to the arts
Fresh food, grocery stores	Imagine Children's Museum	Tourism
Non-profits serving youth and families	Museums	Resilience
Service, civic groups		

This asset list is not intended as a comprehensive list of all programs, or services, rather, it is meant to identify exceptional or unexpected local assets that serve as a starting place for future work. There is a need to better understand what assets already exist that the community can learn from, build upon, connect with, and scale up to help create a stronger, more equitable early childhood system.

Key Findings

- Taos County has a wealth of community members dedicated to serving families with young children.
- Strong, long-standing community collaborations are involved in multi-level, cross-sector efforts to build capacity and directly impact children and families.
- The 100% Initiative and early childhood professionals have ushered in a strong commitment from many community providers and advocates to implement trauma-informed approaches and acknowledge an understanding of ACEs and trauma.
- Momentum over the last few years to address the needs of all children to prevent exposure to adversity and build resilience.



TAOS COUNTY ECONOMICS

Taos County boasts of an UNESCO World Heritage Site at Taos Pueblo, a world-class resort with Taos Ski Valley, Rio Grande rafting, unique entertainment in Red River, the scenic high road through Peñasco all the way through the enchanted circle byway to Questa. The natural environment and culture, tradition, and adventure draws in visitors to Taos County from across the country and globe. The economy of Taos County has traditionally been driven by tourism and agriculture. The largest employment categories are tourism-related services (retail and arts, entertainment, recreation, hospitality, food services), education/healthcare, professional services. Low wages and income disparity is a deepening issue creating barriers for historic families and residents and driving a growing sense of displacement and frustration. The lack of affordability doesn't just impact tourists, it affects the people who keep the town running, operating ski lifts, hotel concierges, selling clothes, and early childhood professionals.

Children, ages 0-17, living in poverty

Taos County 24.9%

New Mexico: 24.9%

U.S.: 17%

Median Household Income

Taos County: \$41, 973

New Mexico: \$51,243

U.S.: \$64,994

MIT Cost of Living

1 adult with 1 child, Taos County: \$66,114

Single-parent households with children

Taos: 51.3%

New Mexico: 44%

U.S.: 34%

Families with children in which no parent is in the workforce

Taos County: 20.5%

New Mexico: 10.6%

U.S.: 11.5%

Median home price

Taos: \$281,500

Rent in Taos: \$618

Table 5: Taos County Employment details¹⁹

Taos Jobs and Industry	Sector Employees
Accommodation, Food Services	2,563
Government	2,151
Health Care, Social Assistance	2,084
Retail Trade	1,900
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	1,709
Construction	1,080
Professional, Scientific, Tech.	962
Other Services (excl. public admin.)	959
Real estate, Rental, Leasing	864
Admin., Waste Services	592
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	456
Mining (incl. fossil fuels)	437
Educational Services	435
Finance, Insurance	366
Information	269

Matched Taxable Gross Receipts, by Industry in Taos County²⁰

Retail trade: 27%

Construction: 22%

Accommodation and Food Services: 15%

*Matched Taxable Gross Receipts are the best tax data available to show underlying economic activity. The data collection process matches a tax payment with reported receipts for each taxpayer by industry.

KEY FINDINGS

- Large percentage (51.3%) of single-parent households with children in Taos County
- Median household income (\$41,973) is 35.42% less than the U.S. average median income
- MIT’s cost of living calculation of \$66,114 for one adult with one child in Taos County
- Largest industry employment categories include accommodation, food services, retail trade, arts, entertainment, and recreation.

¹⁹ <https://taoscompplan.org/>

²⁰ <https://edd.newmexico.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/June-2022-Economic-Summary-Taos.pdf>

Also, worth noting: Poverty levels for Black, Native American and Hispanic children (Taos's total percentage of Native American and Hispanic children population is 80.6%) are consistently above the national average²¹, and these generations-long inequities persist regardless of family structure.

DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

The greatest innovations often come not from brainstorming in isolation, but from connecting existing ideas in new ways. – Jack Shonkoff, Center on the Developing Child

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Taos originates from communities that are rich in cultures, languages, and histories. These communities developed systems that have existed far before any formal colonized system that was put in place. There was a focus on interdependence, interrelatedness, interconnectedness, along with the relationships and respect that goes along with being in community together. Children were traditionally held as sacred beings at the center of communities and gifts to families bestowed with the responsibility of child rearing as a communal act. With an understanding that parents are their children's first teachers and are doing the best they can with what they have, there is a need to envision a shared interest in everyone doing well. We do know a lot about the kinds of conditions in which young children grow up which increases the likelihood of a healthy, productive future – supportive relationships, manageable levels of stress, basic needs met, opportunities for learning, buffering and protection from excessive stress. In a community like Taos, there's a mix of self-reliance and shared responsibility. No family gets by alone.

One family participant stated, "Shared responsibility for each other – to get through this together, whether it be people caring about their communities, decision makers caring about the well-being of their state or their country. Shared vested interests. Although, we are not all in this with equal resources and equal assets."

One of the most prominent findings from the community conversations is that a fully functioning system is holistic and addresses the interconnection of issues that are woven throughout families' lives. The challenges families face are multifaceted, and a system that truly addresses these challenges and provides the support families need to be fully thriving will address these needs comprehensively. Children are already learning prenatally and they develop and learn at a rapid pace in their early years. This time in life is critical for lifelong progress, and the adults who provide the care, education, and support of children from birth through age 8 bear a great responsibility for their health, development, and learning as well as supporting families, and foundational to the economy. The educator and care giver role has been recognized as essential, although it is incredibly difficult and complex.

²¹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/basic-facts-children-poverty/>

New Mexico has been ranked 50th or 49th in overall child well-being since 2012 in the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Books. The increases in federal and state investments in early childhood services and education over the last five years represent only a first step in a long journey to address the pressing needs of New Mexico’s children and families. The Kids Count data can lag several years in its reporting and systems change takes time. New Mexico is leading the way by enacting bold reform in the past three years to start moving the needle in systems changes: 1) Legislation was passed to knock down silos and create a consolidated children’s agency housing all of the state’s services for young children in the NM ECECD; 2) NM Senate approved creation of an Early Childhood Trust Fund on a unanimous, bipartisan vote²²; 3) Led the nation in provision of bonus pay for child care professionals supporting the efforts of essential workers²³; 4) Raised reimbursement rates using a cutting edge cost estimation model²⁴; 5) Utilized COVID relief funding to provide a year of free child care to virtually every child in NM²⁵; 6) Increasing wages for early childhood educators by \$3 an hour.²⁶



²² <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/new-mexico-establishes-early-childhood-trust-fund/>

²³ <https://www.krwg.org/regional/2020-05-02/new-mexico-launches-incentive-pay-program-to-support-child-care-professionals>

²⁴ https://www.nmeccd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/P5FS_NMReport_v.3d_forWeb.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/04/28/new-mexico-free-child-care/>

²⁶ <https://www.krqe.com/news/new-mexico/new-grant-means-pay-raise-for-nm-childcare-providers/>

NEXT STEPS

- Paso a Paso Network will use data compiled in this Needs Assessment to engage in a root cause analysis process with particular focus on issues of equity and collective action. This will inform strategic planning to develop innovative responses to the needs identified by the community.
- Continuous quality improvement development in the adoption of a collective impact model and results-based strategies.
- Interview/survey largest employers in Taos County focusing on supportive structures for early childhood systems and the impact of early childhood systems on the business sector and economy.
- Incorporate a Taos County family centered approach, including a family leadership council.
- Conduct community roundtable discussions on the early childhood needs in the community.

CONCLUSIONS

“I hope my nietos (grandchildren) grow up in a community around family that loves them and a community that feels safe.” – Taoseña, retired educator of 30+ years

The following conclusions were drawn from the Needs Assessment data. These conclusions are presented without regard to priority as they are, in most cases, interdependent and reflective of the Taos community. The conclusion will inform planning and be used as a key call to action and system changes.

- 1) Taos County’s children and families are diverse – programs and systems must meet the needs of the diverse population and their experiences.
- 2) The high cost of living and low incomes in the county impact family’s ability to afford child care, housing, and meet their basic needs; and the ability of providers to deliver child care affordably.
- 3) There is an inadequate supply of child care that meets the needs of families, and we must find ways to support existing care providers and support family innovation in caring for their children.
- 4) The early childhood workforce, primarily women of color who are poorly compensated, despite years of experience, education, and expertise, do not experience pay equity across teaching wages.
- 5) Families want more family friendly spaces, non-traditional care hours, and more access to care and education.

- 6) The Paso a Paso Network provides the opportunity for equitable, collective community action to help address the needs of early childhood services and programs, and families with young children.

The early years matter when it comes to lifelong health and all of the systems that touch the lives of children, and their families, offers an opportunity to strengthen the foundations and capacity that make lifelong healthy development possible. Taos County's diverse population spread throughout rural areas and townships experience unique strengths, challenges, and visions for their children. Families would like to see more supportive, flexible child care options, more activities for young children, more community spaces, and more local, specialized health care. There is an overarching need to ensure that early childhood professionals are supported and paid equitably, and continue to enhance services and programming that are accessible for families with young children while making early childhood supports the norm for the community. Challenges to achieving a fully functioning system to address these needs include access and availability of interconnected fundamental services including quality child care, medical care, housing, schools, food security, transportation, living wages, and community supports. There is a need to continue working towards a coordinated and aligned early childhood system that leverages the community's existing assets coupled with sustainable funding for local early childhood systems building. Today's sustained investment in New Mexico's early childhood ecosystem serves as a baseline and plants the seeds into the ground for a more prosperous, equitable community in the future.



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Thank you to Taos County families for their valuable insights that have resulted in this document. This report could not have been prepared without the cooperation of the Paso a Paso Network membership and ECECD. The coordinated and collaborative effort have produced a report that will provide a means for government, decision makers, early childhood professionals, families, and concerned citizens to better understand and evaluate the state and Taos County's early childhood needs, priorities, and most importantly, support the future generations of our community.

Paso a Paso Network Early Childhood Community Needs Assessment

Conducted on behalf of

Paso a Paso Network
Local Early Childhood Systems Building Grant

Conducted by

Coordinator, Local Early Childhood Systems Building Grant

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APPENDIX A: PASO A PASO NETWORK MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Paso a Paso Network Membership Survey

1A.) What makes you most excited about your work serving families with young children, and
1B.) in what ways have you implemented innovative ideas in your work to best serve families
with young children in the Taos community?

2A.) What challenges might come your way in your work and how might you meet them to best
serve families with young children? 2B.) What would strengthen your work to best serve
families with young children?

3. How should we conduct our work together in order to enable you/your organization's best
contributions to our collective success for overall early childhood well-being in the Taos
community?

4. What else should local and state leaders know about the needs of families and children
based on the services you provide in the community?

APPENDIX B: PASO A PASO NETWORK LISTENING SESSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discover the Best of What Is:

Can you each think about an individual story of when you felt most excited and engaged as a part of a team or partnership (in the early childhood profession or in your professional capacity). Can you describe what was in place, who you worked with, what you were working towards, and why this experience was so memorable to you.

2. Dream What Might Be:

Now, project yourselves two years into the future, and I invite you to imagine the Paso a Paso Network as the most efficient, productive, and successful coalition in which you have ever worked. Can you respond to these questions in pairs:

What has changed?

What has grown?

What is now possible?

APPENDIX C: PASO A PASO NETWORK FAMILY/CAREGIVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Paso a Paso Network Family/Caregiver Interview Questions:

1. What are the best parts about raising your child(ren) in Taos County?
2. What makes it hard or challenging?
3. If you had a magic wand and could change one thing – one person, program, service, or resource – about parenting/caregiving in Taos County, what would it be?

APPENDIX D: FAMILY DIALOGUE CIRCLE AGENDA

Paso a Paso Network | Family Dialogue Agenda (both in-person and virtual)

<p>Welcome Intros All Around</p> <p>Open the circle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Open the circle● What brings you to this conversation about the well-being of our youngest children in our community?
<p>Hopes & Dreams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Discuss three hopes and dreams you have for your children as they grow up● Share out and reactions
<p>Community Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Imagine a community where all of our youngest children are thriving and have opportunities to reach their full potential● Share out and reactions
<p>Discovering Unmet Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Close your eyes and think of your community now, what it looks like today.● Where are the strengths, needs, and gaps across your ideal and current communities?
<p>Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Coalition invite! Please join us to continue this conversation● Closing the circle● Survey and \$50 stipend follow up/option● Contact: coordinator@pasotaos.org