

A Multi-Sector Approach to Closing the Facility Shortage Gap

CASE STUDY

In 2015, California's San Mateo County identified a tremendous shortage of high-quality early learning facilities, which impacted children of all ages and income levels. This facility shortage led to the region's inability to expand access to early childhood education programs.

In 2015 the region was in need of 3,000 spaces, specifically for children under age two.

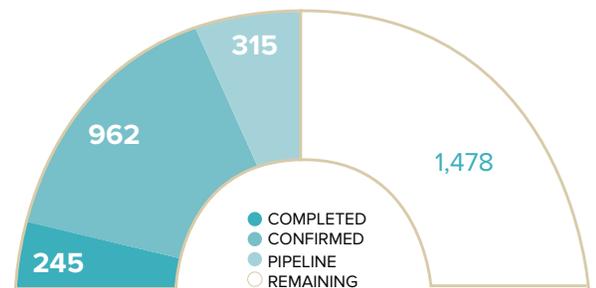
As a result, San Mateo County started to work towards a solution. Using lessons learned, [Build Up for San Mateo County's Children](#) (Build Up SMC) was established to improve the supply of childcare facilities that include high-quality infant and toddler care and increase the overall availability of childcare for children birth to five in San Mateo County.

Build Up SMC knew that awareness was low around the economic implications of a childcare shortage outside of the early childhood education community. From the beginning, building allies and champions from outside the field of early childhood education (i.e. city staff, elected officials, and business leaders) was critical to making positive change.

Build Up SMC's network of staff, volunteers, and strategic partners works with city planners, developers, employers, school districts, and other community organizations to identify opportunities for the inclusion of childcare in ongoing county economic development activities, including the reuse of existing available space, inclusion of childcare in new developments, partnerships with large employers, and generating new capital funds.

THE RESULTS

More than 1,500 childcare spaces have either been completed or are in the development pipeline, moving the needle towards Build Up SMC's 2020 goal of developing 3,000 new spaces to support San Mateo County families.



THE NATIONAL CHALLENGE

There is no question that today's parents struggle to find safe, affordable and nurturing places for children to spend their days while parents pursue employment or education. For example, 51 percent of Americans live in "childcare deserts," where licensed programs can accommodate fewer than a third of the children in the community. The 2017 SMC Child Care Needs Assessment cites that the region's childcare centers could only support 60 percent of the region's infants, leaving a gap of 2,527 spaces. For low-income families, only 13 percent of the need for affordable infant and toddler care is being met.

According to a [Center for American Progress report](#), across the U.S., nearly one in five infants and toddlers live in poverty, leaving millions of children at risk of falling behind before they can even walk. It is no surprise that gaps in children's cognitive abilities by income are evident as early as nine months old and significantly widen by the age of two.

The Bipartisan Policy Center's [Framework on Early Childhood Education](#) cites that nearly 129,000 center-based programs are serving seven million children nationwide, and another one million in-home providers serve more than 2.7 million children. The Urban Institute [reports](#) that 50 percent of those children are in full-time care, which means they spend 35 hours or more each week at the facility at a time when 75 percent of their brain is developing. Children begin learning at birth. Every interaction that young children have with a caregiver adds to their experiences, which in turn influences the rapid brain development that occurs in the first few years of life and lays the framework for success throughout life.

After families do secure a spot, paying for it is another challenge. Though costs vary widely, the average annual cost is around \$11,000. In 2018, Congress approved historic increases in federal aid for early childhood education. As states determined the priority of need for that funding, often those investments are spent on the most critical need, such as raising reimbursements for providers, helping parents afford care, or supporting the professional development of teachers. The physical infrastructure of early learning environments is overlooked.

THE LANDSCAPE IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Prior to establishing Build Up, multiple initiatives were in motion to try and support the early childhood education community across California. [The Big Lift](#) was seeking to expand preschool in targeted neighborhoods and the California Department of Education was also offering expanded contracts for state preschool. However, because preschool programs could not find the space to open new classrooms, San Mateo County was not able to take advantage of these new funding opportunities and had to return approximately \$1 million in state preschool funding.

Due to this lack of space and inability to expand early childhood education offerings, in 2016 First 5 San Mateo County funded the Center for Early Learning at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to convene a Childcare and Preschool Facilities Taskforce to come up with recommendations for tackling this pervasive issue. At the same time, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency funded Brion Economics to conduct an early learning facilities [needs assessment](#).

The study concluded that San Mateo County would need 13,981 new spaces for children ages 0-4 by 2025, requiring \$428.4 million in capital funding. The study also found that the number one barrier for early childhood education programs looking to expand was finding a facility.

FROM IDEA TO DELIVERY

In 2017, based on recommendations from the Childcare and Preschool Facilities Taskforce, a planning committee designed what would become Build Up SMC. The planning partners outlined an organizational structure, sought startup funding, developed a communications plan, and drafted organizational goals for the organization.

A multi-sector Advisory Body comprised of city planners, elected officials, developers, employers, school districts, and faith-based organizations plays a critical role in ensuring that childcare remains a part of conversations in the community.

KEY GOALS

1. Work across sectors to reuse/re-designate existing space to increase the number of early learning spaces.
2. Work with cities and county on policies and incentives to prioritize childcare in future developments.
3. Engage large employers to create childcare facilities for their employees and/or become an advocate.
4. Increase general revenue for facility development and assist providers in drawing down existing funds.

“With a lack of facilities being one of the most difficult obstacles, cities and counties need to prioritize developments that include childcare. Childcare availability doesn't just impact families, it's a critical piece of community infrastructure with massive economic implications.

— AMY BUCKMASTER
President and CEO

Redwood City-San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Solicit feedback from key stakeholders early to develop talking points and recommended actions. It is important to **speak the language of the audience not just the language of early education**.
- Start with a coalition of the willing to build momentum. Build Up SMC started with a focus on faith-based organizations because many have vacant space and are seeking to earn revenue.
- Make the case with data. Use data to pinpoint areas of highest needs to the cities and school districts.
- Very few people are experts in childcare facility development and how it relates to land use policy. Lean on the knowledge of those who are experts to mentor and train others to work on solutions.
- Build allies and champions from outside the field of early education (i.e. city staff, elected officials, and business leaders) because **these entities are critical to making positive change**.



FUNDING

Build Up SMC's funding support was a blend of public and private partners. Public entities, such as the County of San Mateo (Measure K Funds), First 5 San Mateo County, and the San Mateo County Office of Education, paired with financial support from private foundations, such as Heising-Simons and Jacques M Littlefield, supported startup operations with dedicated staff based at the Child Care Coordinating Council, the County's Resource and Referral Agency. An anonymous private donor through Silicon Valley Community Foundation and a corporate grant from Gilead Sciences, Inc. seeded Build Up SMC's new capital fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Whether speaking to a school board or providing testimony at public meetings of the city council, Build Up SMC team members come equipped with tailored talking points and resources to outline how that stakeholder group is impacted and steps they can take to get engaged. They take their role as champions on this issue seriously and ensure their message is always communicated clearly, consistently, and tailored to the audience.

Build Up San Mateo County represents an innovative approach to developing childcare and early learning facilities. Build Up leverages the advocacy and expertise of local government, the business community, and the nonprofit sectors to help establish new facilities and expand capacity.

— DAVE PINE
Build Up SMC Co-Chair & San Mateo County Supervisor

EARLY ED ADVOCATES

- Share local childcare supply gap data with community leaders and employers
- Support parents and encourage them to voice their needs for services with their employers and elected officials
- Track and support federal, state, and local policy changes and new funding opportunities
- Ask business, nonprofits, and other influential stakeholder groups to partner beyond just being a powerful force to push the agenda—grow equal partnerships

COUNTY/CITY GOVERNMENT

- Consider childcare for all plans and priorities
- Use city/county-owned property for childcare
- Prioritize new developments that include childcare
- Reduce or eliminate fees for childcare businesses
- Clarify the zoning and streamline the permit process to make it easier for childcare businesses to find facilities and open quickly

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

- Partner with Build Up SMC to create an Employer Childcare Facilities Plan for your community
- [Join](#) Build Up SMC's coalition of community advocates
- Be a champion for this issue and talk to your members about why this issue matters
- Invite Build Up SMC members to present to your networks
- Work with Build Up SMC to address your employees' unmet childcare needs

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Use vacant space for childcare
- Provide on-campus childcare for employees
- Include early childhood education in bond initiatives

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

- Extend your mission to include childcare programming
- Lease unused space to childcare operators

PHILANTHROPISTS

- Donate capital and planning funds
- Host cross-sector convenings
- Fund teams working on this challenge in their community

