



**Bainum Family
Foundation**

Assessing Community Needs in Park Heights





Introduction

The Bainum Family Foundation has implemented an extensive community engagement effort in Park Heights, an underserved but resilient neighborhood in northwest Baltimore, Maryland. Between December 2015 and March 2016, the Foundation conducted a family forum with instant polling, three focus groups with Park Heights parent residents, and multiple interviews with community leaders and others. The intent was to hear the concerns of the community regarding the current opportunities being provided to children and their families, to gather varied perspectives about services that would enhance the development of the community's young children, and to understand the resources and services families need in supporting the development of their children.

These efforts included a diverse group of nearly 140 parents, grandparents and guardians, along with public officials, child care and health care professionals, and other area residents. All discussions explored current and desired needs and resources in four key areas:

- **Child care (for infants to 2-year-olds)**
- **Early learning programs (for 3- to 5-year-olds not yet in kindergarten)**
- **Out-of-school time (for after-school and summer enrichment programs)**
- **Supports and services**

The following report is a comprehensive review of the local community's feedback and includes qualitative summaries, quantitative data, a conclusion and next steps. Overall, what we witnessed were passionate, engaged parents, grandparents, educators, community leaders and others coming together to find solutions to this community's challenges.



Bainum Family Foundation – Our Mission

The Bainum Family Foundation, based in Bethesda, Maryland, was established in 1968 by Stewart and Jane Bainum to help children exit poverty through high-quality educational opportunities and other support.

The Foundation has forged a close relationship in Park Heights through our presence at Baltimore Junior Academy (BJA), a K-8 Seventh-day Adventist school with which we have partnered to enhance both academics and facilities.

We know that early childhood matters significantly because experiences early in life can have a lasting impact on later learning, behavior and health.¹

We also know that the academic performance of students living in poverty lags behind that of high-income students by three to six academic years.

In Baltimore, the achievement gap in fourth-grade reading proficiency is significant: In 2015, students who were eligible for free/reduced-price lunch, an indicator of low family income, had an average score that was 19 points lower than that of students who were not eligible. This is the same as 2009, which also saw a performance gap of 19 points.²

BAINUM FAMILY FOUNDATION CORE VALUES

- **CONTINUOUS LEARNING** – Embrace change and grow
- **INTEGRITY** – Be open and transparent
- **COLLABORATION** – Respect and engage all partners
- **COMMITMENT** – Be accountable and persistent

Additionally, investments in quality early childhood programs produce economic returns, including students who are better educated, employed and productive, and less likely to be incarcerated or dependent on public assistance.

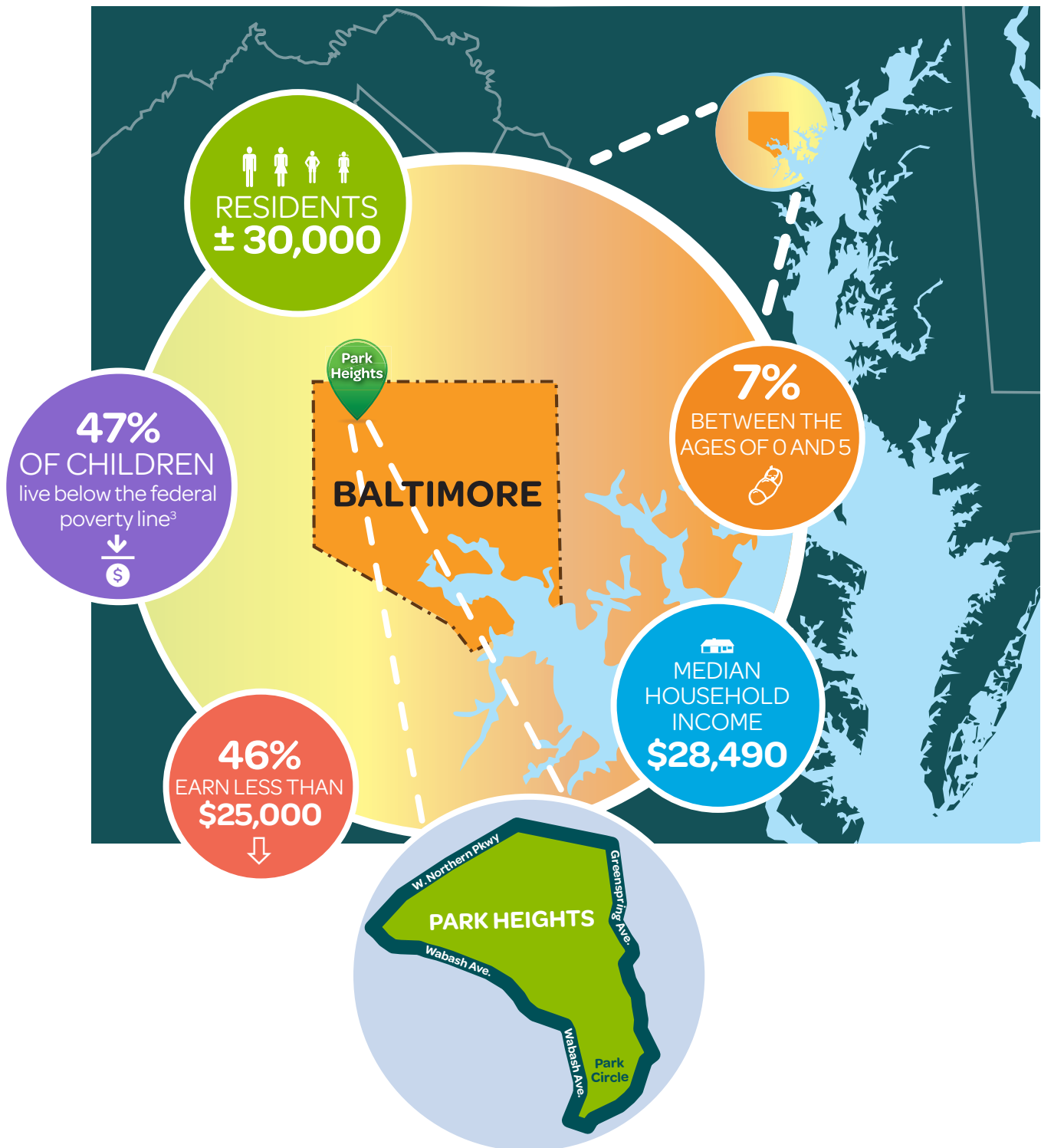
The following sections of this report compile the community voices that are so foundational to addressing the most pressing needs in the most effective manner possible.

¹ Source: Center on the Developing Child (2009). *Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development* (Brief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

² Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card*, 2015.

Gathering Feedback in Park Heights

Park Heights, Baltimore, Maryland, at a Glance



³ Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, Vital Signs Data, Census Data 2010-2013.

Engagement and Methodology

The Park Heights community engagement effort included three streams of activity to gather insights from a broad range of community members:

Family forum: A total of 102 parents and other community members (including public officials, child care and health care professionals, and other area residents) participated in the family forum hosted by the Bainum Family Foundation on December 15, 2015, at Baltimore Junior Academy in Park Heights. Professional facilitators from Public Engagement Associates and trained table facilitators led the discussions and provided worksheets, discussion materials and keypad technology for instant polling.

Focus groups: A total of 27 parents, grandparents and guardians participated in three focus groups conducted at Zeta Center, February 22, 2016 (nine participants); at Judy Center, March 4, 2016 (12 participants); and at St. Vincent Center, March 4, 2016 (six participants). Professional facilitators from Public Engagement Associates led the focus groups, and responses were collected via handheld keypads.

Interviews: For additional qualitative perspective and context, Foundation staff conducted one-on-one in-person discussions throughout the community with 10 community and nonprofit leaders.

WORKING DEFINITIONS IN THIS REPORT

Participants in the community engagement activities were provided with the following list of working definitions to ensure a common understanding of the topics being discussed.

CHILD CARE CENTERS: For children younger than 3 years old, parents often can care for their children in their home, or their children are cared for by a relative or friend. As an alternative, sometimes their children attend a child care center, which can be public or private.⁴

PRE-KINDERGARTEN: In Baltimore City, pre-kindergarten (pre-K) refers to formal schooling for 3- and 4-year-olds. Pre-K programs may be part of an elementary school, or they may be stand-alone programs.

PRENATAL CARE: Preventive health care provided through regular checkups, screening tests and counseling to women during pregnancy.

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS: Where a nurse or another health professional might visit an expecting mother in her home to share information on caring for a newborn baby. This can include physical care as well as socioemotional and verbal development.

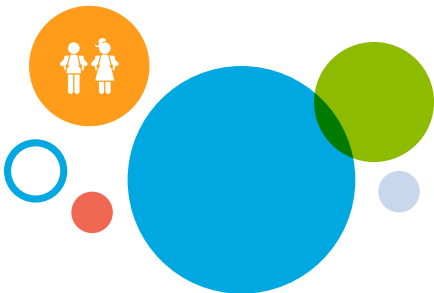
MENTAL WELLNESS: How children manage their emotions and behaviors, as well as children who have serious learning challenges. Support services might include school resource teachers, counselors and other trained professionals in the community who help in this area.

PHYSICAL HEALTH: Supports needed to ensure that children have healthy bodies. Support services might include school nurses, hospitals, doctors, dentists and other health providers in the community.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: Children's relationships with adults, such as parents and teachers, and relationships with other children. Supports in this area might include family members, teachers, coaches, mentors and others.

AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING: Tutoring after school can focus on reading skills, math skills or other key subjects. Tutoring might take place at a child's school and be provided by a trained teacher. Tutoring typically focuses on giving students a little extra help on standard, grade-level work.

SUMMER ENRICHMENT CAMP: Summer enrichment programs can include reading and math tutoring, plus creative and fun activities including art, dance, sports and science experiments. Summer enrichment could be five days a week, six or seven hours per day. It could be located in Park Heights and include breakfast and lunch.



⁴ While this was the working definition for child care centers used during the family forum, we do wish to clarify that care by an unregulated nonrelative outside of the child's home is illegal in Maryland.

Discussion Topic 1: Child Care and Pre-K

Research shows that the first three years of a child's life are critical in terms of development. Park Heights parents and guardians appear deliberate and careful in their selection of child care. Many families convey that they are struggling due to limited financial opportunities, but they say there is much more than cost to consider regarding to whom they entrust the care of their young children.

Who took care of your children when they were between ages 0 and 2?

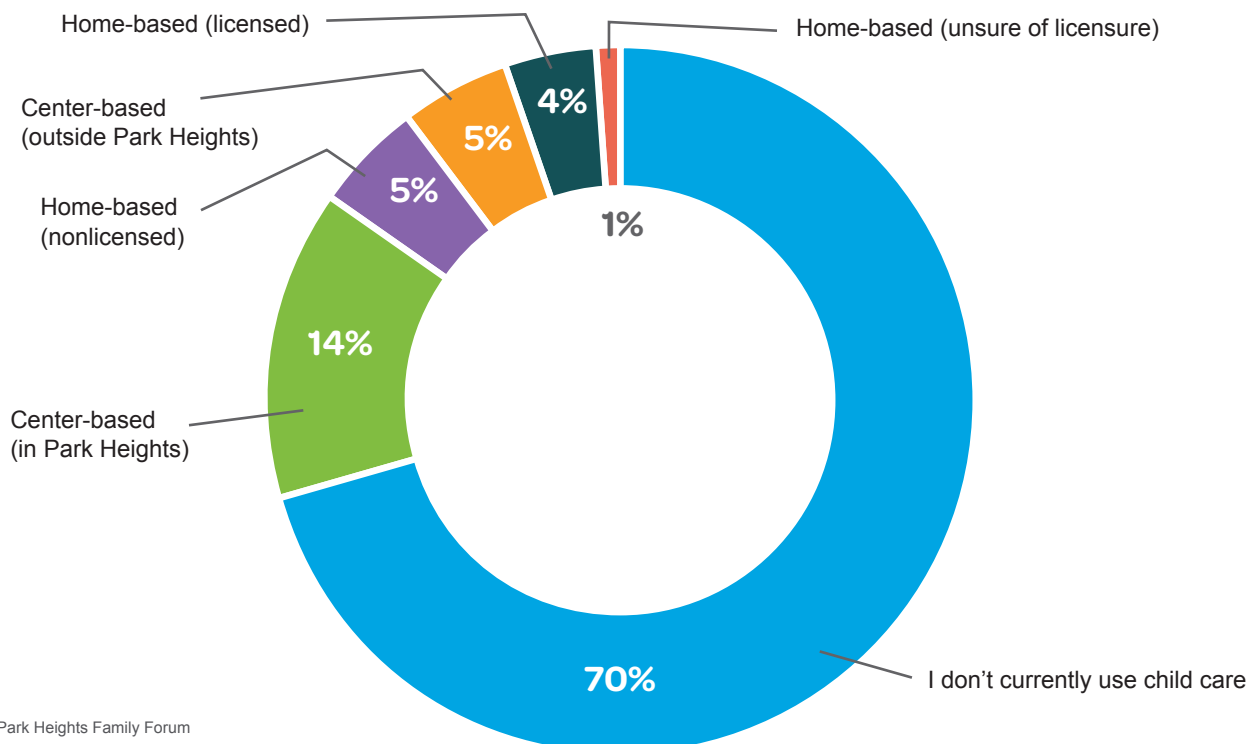
SUMMARY

- The vast majority of mothers responded that either close family members and/or the parents themselves took care of their children in the early years.
- A few respondents indicated that their children attended a child care center where the parent worked.



Survey Data

Which option best describes your selected child care facility? (Number of responses = 92)



Source: Park Heights Family Forum

“[Within Baltimore], Park Heights has ... one of the highest percentages of children who are recorded as having been born and then don’t show up anywhere else until kindergarten.”

— PARKS HEIGHTS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR



What is most important to you when looking for someone or someplace to take care of your child?

SUMMARY

- Trust and safety
- Care by family member at home, where they know their kids are safe and are learning
- A place where staff members are patient and kids are in a safe, learning-oriented, nurturing environment
- Good curriculum, environment and staff
- Special services for learning or medical issues
- Affordability

What has been your experience with these programs – or what have you heard about the experience of others with these programs?

SUMMARY

- Significant learning
- Good socialization
- Effective preparation for kindergarten
- Results
- Special needs challenges for parents in finding the right place
- Good experiences

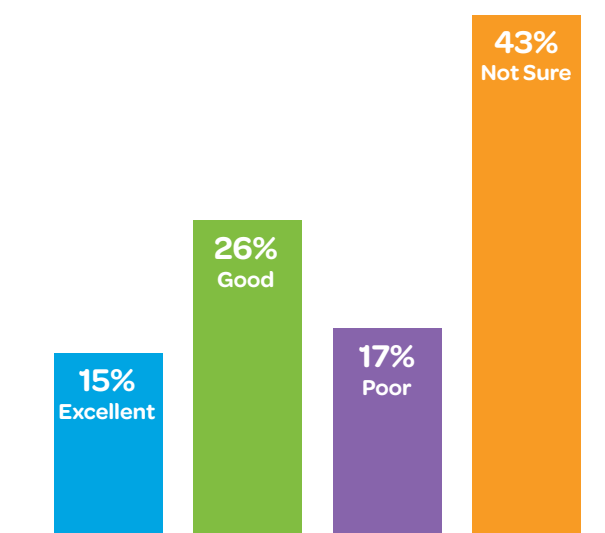
Survey Data

Rank in Order of Importance

- 1 ► AFFORDABILITY
- 2 ► ACCREDITED/LICENSED
- 3 ► LOCATION/TRANSPORTATION
- 4 ► CURRICULUM
- 5 ► HOURS OF OPERATION
- 5 ► FAMILY RELATIONSHIP (TIE)



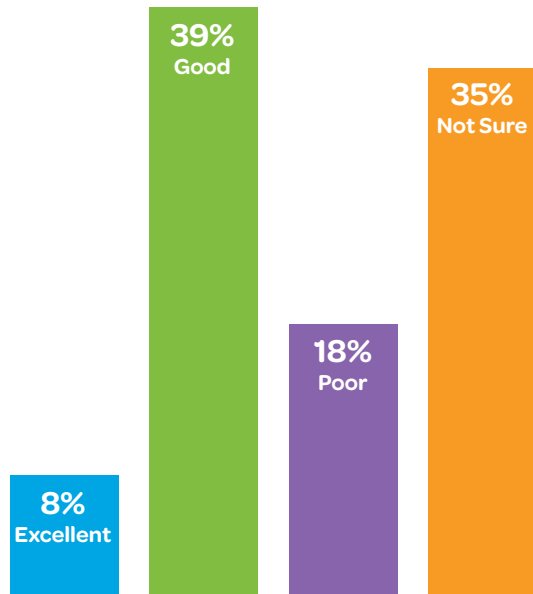
In your neighborhood, how would you rate the pre-K options? (Number of responses = 89)



Excellent — there is more than one good pre-K
 Good — there is at least one good pre-K
 Poor — there are no good pre-K options

Source: Park Heights Family Forum

How would you rate the early childhood center or child care center options from which you have to choose? (Number of responses = 88)



Excellent — there is more than one good child care center
 Good — there is at least one good child care center
 Poor — there are no good child care center options

Source: Park Heights Family Forum

How did you find out about these programs?

SUMMARY

- Word of mouth/referral
- Local government agencies
- Well-known programs
- See places regularly in the neighborhood

Visualize your ideal setting or situation for child care: What changes would you want to see?

SUMMARY

- Feels like home, a place we can trust, where we know they're learning and being loved and nurtured
- Well-structured and appropriate education for the kids
- Quality staff members who love what they do, are well-trained and well-qualified
- Trustworthy teachers who are patient, tolerant and trustworthy
- Engaging activities that are fun and entertaining
- Certified center
- Preparing the kids for pre-K or Head Start
- Fathers as active role models
- Affordable



“While there are some gaps in service delivery, they can be addressed by connecting the many resources that are currently available within the community and identifying opportunities to meet any remaining need.”

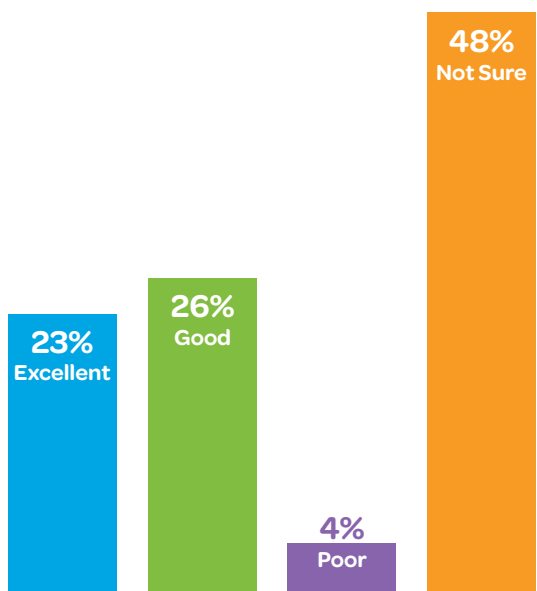
— FORUM PARTICIPANT

Discussion Topic 2: Health and Wellness

In the central cities of many American communities, residents face a confusing maze of health care options. This is also true in Park Heights, where residents who participated in the sessions say there are limited options available for adequate, general health care, but access diminishes even more when considering specialty care, such as mental wellness and healthy relationships. This is troubling due to the negative impact that mental health and unhealthy relationships can have on young children and their learning environment.

Survey Data

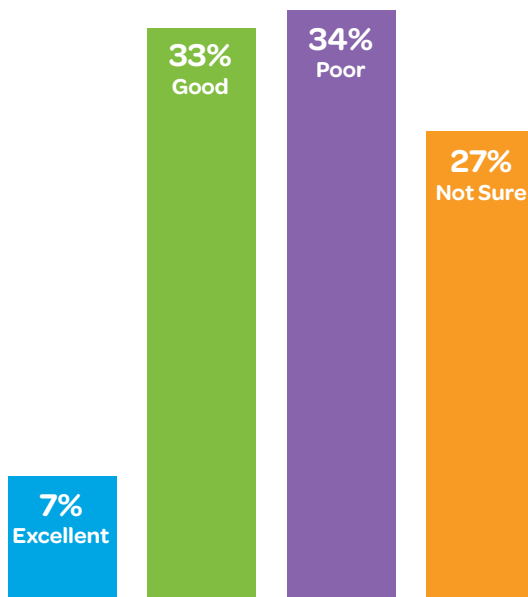
How would you rate the prenatal care you have to choose from? (Number of responses = 82)



Excellent — there is more than one good prenatal service
Good — there is at least one good prenatal service
Poor — there are no good prenatal services

Source: Park Heights Family Forum

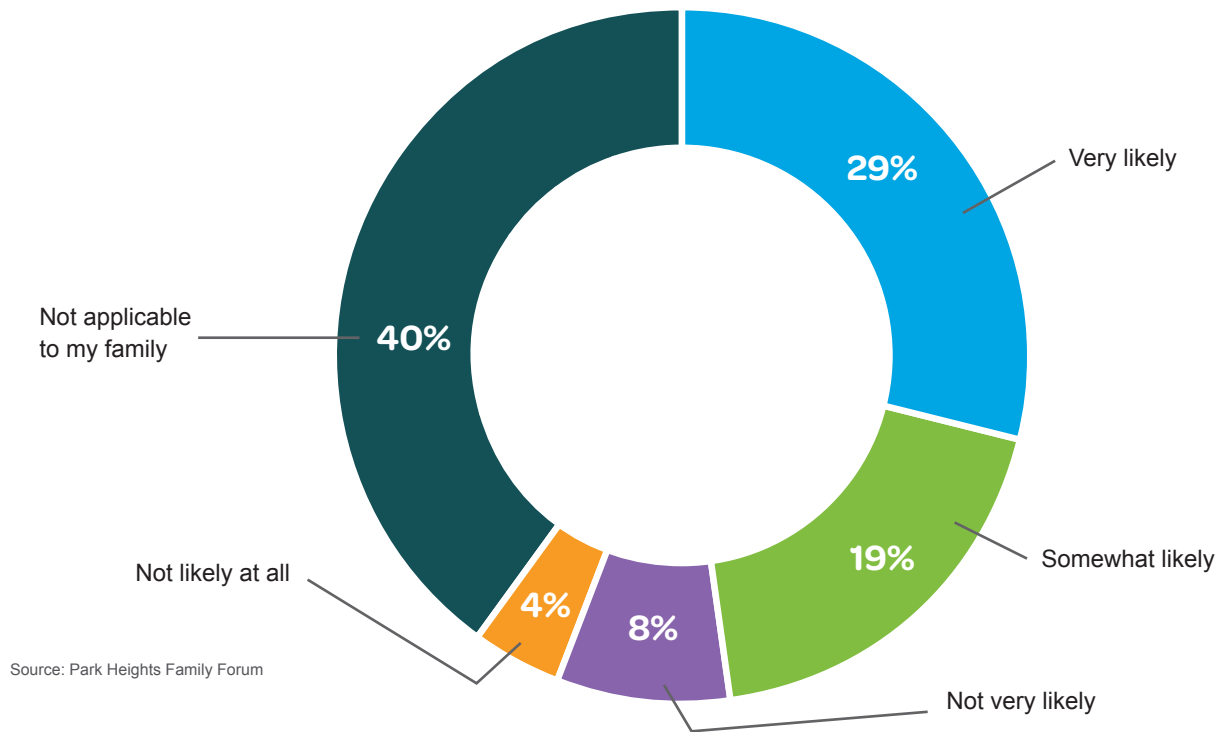
How would you rate the services available to support the physical health of children? (Number of responses = 86)



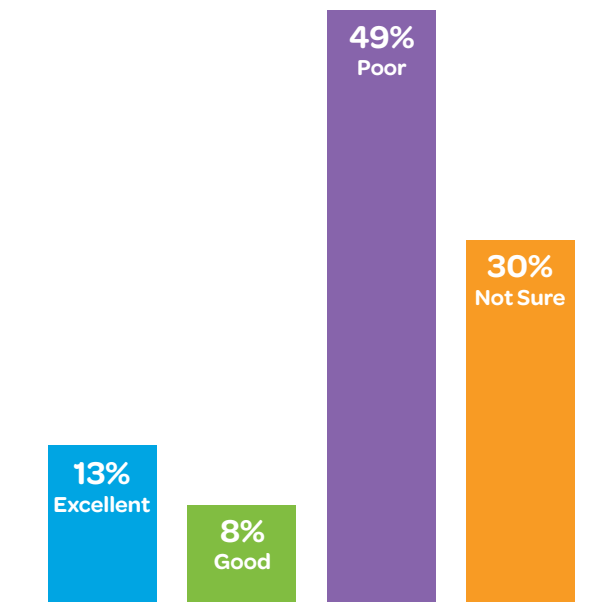
Source: Park Heights Family Forum



How likely are you to participate in a home visiting program? (Number of responses = 88)

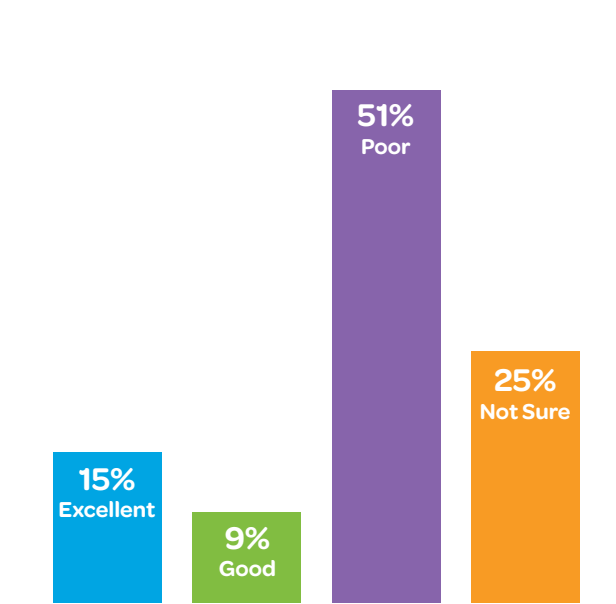


How would you rate the services available to support the mental wellness of your children? (Number of responses = 90)



Source: Park Heights Family Forum

How would you rate the services available to support the healthy relationships of your children? (Number of responses = 75)



Source: Park Heights Family Forum

Discussion Topic 3: Out-of-School Time

Park Heights parents say that trust and safety are two of the most important elements they need to ensure their children are thriving not only in their child care environments but in their neighborhoods, public playgrounds and more. After-school and summer programs can offer this setting, so that children are not only safe, but continue to learn and be nurtured when not in the traditional class setting. Unfortunately, respondents say that the options are quite poor.

Describe the ideal after-school programs and activities for your children.

SUMMARY

- New activities, such as tennis, swimming, computer programming, dance and sports
- Resiliency strategies that teach kids about anger management, dealing with trauma, etc.
- Activities that are fun and educational
- Former Park Heights recreation center or community center where children can do homework, participate in clubs, take field trips and more
- Affordable or free
- Dynamic place that excites kids and nurtures learning
- Someplace trustworthy

What have you done for summer programs for your kids ages 3–8?

SUMMARY

- Free kids' activities advertised in the city newspaper
- Swimming, library, Judy Art Center
- Place that has well-structured and appropriate education for the kids
- Most programs are not affordable

What would be ideal (or more ideal) for the current summer programs and activities for your children?

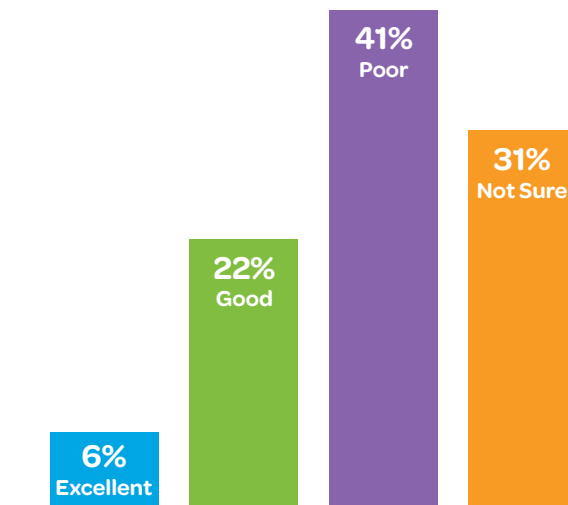
SUMMARY

- Affordable, fun and educational
- Similar to Freedom Schools
- Diverse activities, such as field trips, sports, swimming, school camp, etc.
- Provide enrichment through summer

Survey Data

How would you rate the number of good after-school options to choose from?

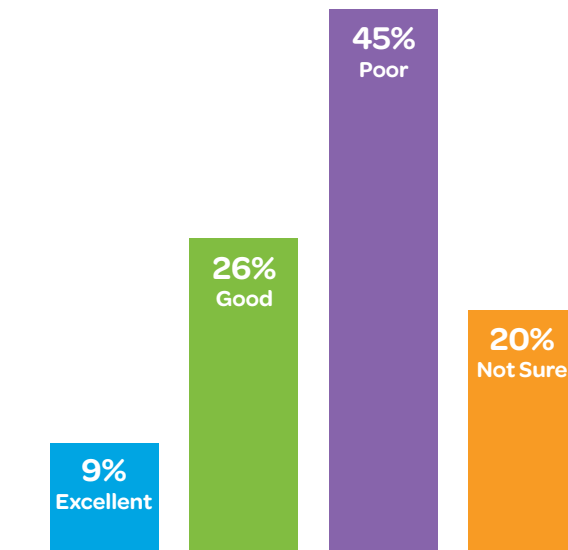
(Number of responses = 78)



Source: Park Heights Family Forum

How would you rate the number of good summer enrichment options to choose from?

(Number of responses = 80)



Source: Park Heights Family Forum

Discussion Topic 4: Supports and Services

Park Heights parents acknowledge the need for a range of community supports and services to supplement and complement their efforts to raise their families.

What kinds of supports and services do families of young children need in Park Heights?

SUMMARY

- Affordable housing
- Proper information and services for kids with special needs
- Support and mentorship for young or new fathers
- Health, including insurance and mobile clinics
- Support for parents and kids in dealing with trauma/grief
- Transportation
- Family advocate or case worker to help support parents

What is the best way for people to learn about family support issues and services available in the community?

SUMMARY

- Schools
- Child care services
- Community school
- Places frequented by mothers and families, such as local stores and offices
- Library



Conclusions

Parents experience significant stress in raising children in Park Heights, and they are clearly eager to provide their children with the tools and support to learn, grow and develop in such a challenging environment. While there were stories of frustration, fear and hopelessness, participants were passionate and forthcoming in providing exceptional insights into ways to build a new landscape for children and families in Park Heights.

Key Themes Emerged

Throughout the listening sessions, a few key themes emerged, which sum up parents' concerns for their children in Park Heights. For their children, they want a place they can trust, that is safe, that is available, that they can afford, that helps build a strong community, and that offers the same support and care they would receive from family members as caregivers. Participants repeatedly cited the need for safe spaces and one-stop shops to assist parents, convene groups and publicize critical information on all of these issues.

TRUST

SAFETY

AVAILABILITY

AFFORDABILITY

COMMUNITY

FAMILY

Child care is complex in Park Heights, a neighborhood in which only 30% of forum attendees and fewer focus group members currently use child care and pre-K options external to the home. For parents interested in placement outside the home, there are limited options.

Also, many providers said they are struggling to enhance the quality of their programs to meet Maryland Excel standards due to the costs of training and staffing for small providers.

Outside Investments Highly Valued

Participants in the community engagement process were asked how important it is for an organization like the Bainum Family Foundation to invest time, energy and money in their community. At the family forum, a strong majority said these investments were very important.

RESPONDENTS SAYING INVESTMENTS IN THIS AREA WERE VERY IMPORTANT

Making child care options better in your community (Number of responses = 85)	91%
Making early childhood (pre-K) options better in your community (Number of responses = 91)	93%
A home visiting program, where nurses or other trained experts visit mothers of infants in their homes to share information about healthy child development (Number of responses = 80)	86%
Improving supports for children's mental wellness, like more counselors, therapists or learning specialists in Park Heights (Number of responses = 84)	96%
Improving supports for children's healthy relationships, like mentoring, in Park Heights (Number of responses = 80)	93%
Making after-school options better in your neighborhood (Number of responses = 85)	92%
Making summer enrichment options better in your neighborhood (Number of responses = 84)	90%

Source: Park Heights Family Forum

Existing Practices Can Be Leveraged

Community stakeholders identified practices that they believe are working and should be leveraged, including Baltimore's Promise (broader Baltimore cradle-to-career initiative), Park Heights Renaissance education planning process, dedicated funders working to be true partners with community organizations, and many nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

From the Foundation's vantage point, we were extremely pleased, and excited, to see the collaboration among individuals, leaders, organizations and more. The community can accomplish more together than alone, and that is why we are so encouraged by the outpouring of ideas, commitments and support.

Throughout this body of community engagement, we have noted again and again people who are working toward a vision for the children and families of Park Heights and for the City of Baltimore. This is evidenced in the willingness to engage in and the amount of civic participation, the engagement of diverse individuals to influence education planning by Park Heights Renaissance, and strategic alliances among community members, programs and philanthropy. From grassroots work led by George Mitchell and Neighborhoods United to the comprehensive work being completed across the education spectrum through Baltimore's Promise and the Mayor's Fund for Excellence, there is a genuine commitment to improving outcomes. This work and the Family League of Baltimore's work to coordinate resources and build the capacity of small nonprofits and larger partners to offer quality programming are helping to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Next Steps

The Bainum Family Foundation will share this report with key stakeholders in Park Heights and the broader Baltimore community. The insights captured here can help to make a lasting difference in this vital neighborhood.

Acknowledgements

The Bainum Family Foundation is grateful to the parents and families of Park Heights for their many insights and contributions to this report. We also thank the following organizations for sharing their perspectives and providing a broad range of support for the community engagement effort.

Baltimore Junior Academy

Baltimore's Promise

Blaustein Foundation

City of Baltimore

Enterprise Community Partners

Family League of Baltimore

Judy Center

Neighborhoods United

Park Heights Community Health Alliance

Park Heights Renaissance

St. Vincent De Paul Head Start

Smart Steps

Special ProjX dba Public Engagement Associates

Zeta Center





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