Lynnfield Preschool Enrollment Study

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Introduction

The Town of Lynnfield, Massachusetts is reviewing the projected enrollment of students to ensure the school district has sufficient resources and physical space. To support this effort, the Board of Selectmen chartered the School Enrollment and Capacity Exploration Committee (hereafter, the Committee) with the mission of reviewing existing and projected enrollment data to determine if the Lynnfield School System has adequate space for current students and those entering the school system in the near future.

The members of the Committee are:

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- John Scena, Chair
- Christopher Barrett
- Robert Dolan
- Tim Doyle
- Kathyrn Price
- Robert Priestly
- Gary Romano
- Arthur Swanson
- Jane Tremblay
- John Tomasz

The Town of Lynnfield has commissioned a more detailed analysis from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges of the entire K-12 pipeline of students, but the Committee members believed a concentrated look at the preschool population (defined as children from birth to entry into Kindergarten) could complement this larger effort. Civitas Strategies, a Lynnfield-based national consultancy offered their services, *pro bono*, to assist the Committee with the process of collecting and reviewing data from the Lynnfield community to ascertain the potential size of the population of children from birth to age five.

The Civitas Strategy team was aided by Committee member Kathryn Price whose knowledge of the school system and community were invaluable to implementing the research project.

This report is organized into five sections:

- **Methodology** –summarizing the methods used to collect data.
- **Baseline data** – showing data on historical kindergarten enrollment.
- **Family survey results** – presenting the data from a community-wide, virally circulated survey.
- **Provider survey results** – showing the data provided voluntarily by area preschool providers.

- **Analysis** – which presents the results of the assessment of all data collected and related observations.

This study will help inform the current efforts of the Committee, it can also serve as a starting point for future research and analysis by the Town of Lynnfield and the public schools.

Methodology

Civitas Strategies initiated a data collection of potential kindergarteners for the Town of Lynnfield and their probable year of entry. The data collection effort focused on answering critical questions including:

- How many potential students will be entering the Town of Lynnfield's school system in the next five years?
- What are the potential trends in the number of children entering the school system in the near future?
- Where are the preschoolers cared for prior to entering the Town of Lynnfield's school system as a kindergartener?
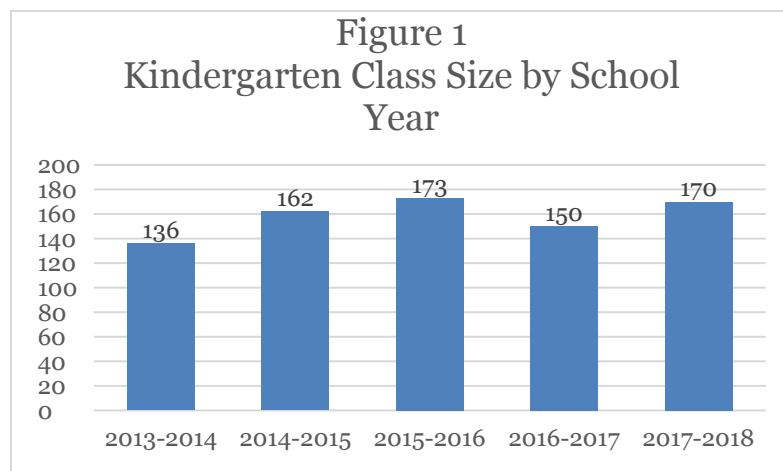
Specifically, data collection included two components:

- **Document Analysis:** The Civitas Strategies team reviewed a summary presentation of data provided by the Superintendent to the Committee regarding past enrollment and class sizes as well as baseline data publicly available from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- **Independent Research:** The Civitas Strategies team with Kathryn Price developed an online survey for local families who can offer insight into how many potential students the Lynnfield school system can anticipate in the next five years. The team also contacted area child care providers for additional data.

The data were then assessed based on the Civitas Strategies' team experience conducting similar projects throughout the nation. The subsequent sections detail the data and analysis resulting from the execution of this methodology.

Baseline Data

the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education tracks the actual class size of the kindergartners by year (found in Figure 1, below) and publishes their data online.

Figure 1
Kindergarten Class Size by School Year

School Year	Class Size
2013-2014	136
2014-2015	162
2015-2016	173
2016-2017	150
2017-2018	170

The baseline data for the past five years indicates a **mean class size of 158** incoming kindergartners. Though there is variability from year to year, this mean class size is a reasonable benchmark for determining the relative size of future classes based on historical enrollment.

Family Survey

A survey for families was developed by the Civitas Strategies team in partnership with Committee members Kathryn Price and Superintendent Tremblay and tested with a set of local volunteers (noted in the Acknowledgements section). Survey Monkey, an online tool, was used to collect data from Lynnfield families.

The survey included the following questions:
- Question 1: Do you currently live in Lynnfield, MA?
- Question 2: Please enter the following information on all children under 5 years of age in household:
    - Age of Child, for up to 10 children per household
    - Location of childcare including in-home care)

For the age of the child, additional guidance was provided – "Please note for the age, of your child's birthday is between now and August 31, please add one year (for example, a three-year-old with an August 14th birthday would enter four)."

The survey was distributed using the Lynnfield Community page on and other relevant groups on the Facebook social media platform. The survey was also emailed by Superintendent Tremblay to all families in the school system and shared virally by local families to their peers through texts and emails.

Family Survey Results

The family survey had 378 responses with 282 residents answering the question of how many potential Lynnfield kindergartners are in their household. The responding families reported a total of 403 potential Lynnfield kindergarteners over the next five years.

The residents of Lynnfield who answered the poll were also queried as to where the preschoolers are being cared for prior to entering the Lynnfield School system. The largest percentage of preschoolers from the family survey, 33% have the preschooler being cared for at home by a family member, nanny or au pair. Of those children being
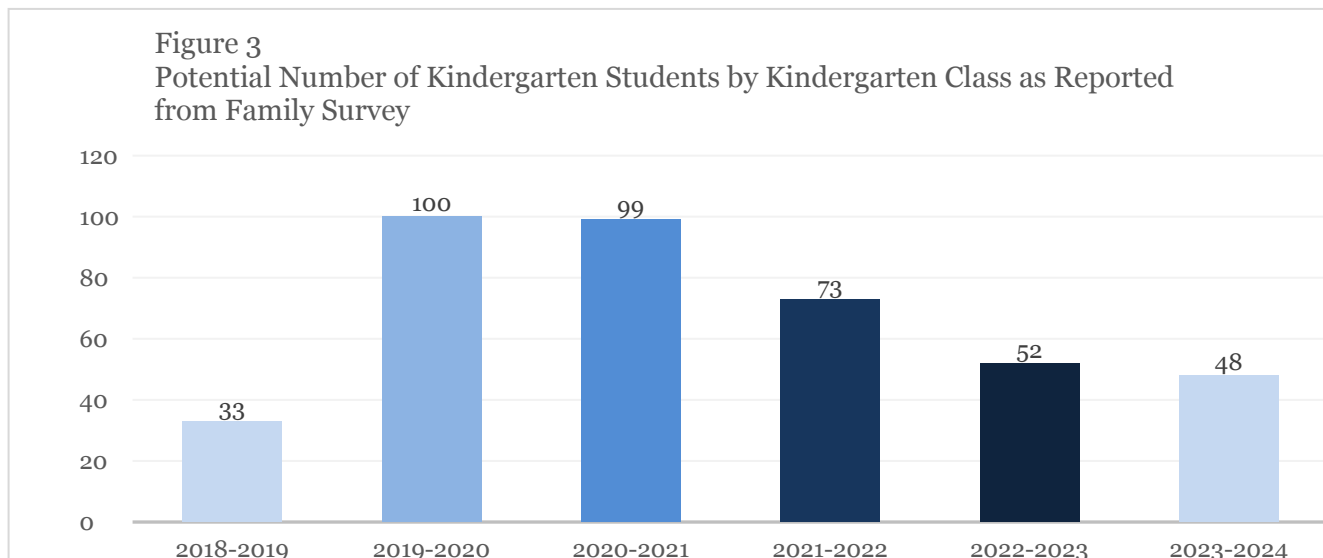
cared for by a family member, a nanny or au pair, 93% of those preschoolers are two years old or younger.

The detailed list of the reported child care providers through the online survey is in Table 1.

Table 1
Type of Care for Children as Reported in the Family Survey

Child Care Providers Reported from Survey	Number of Students	% of reported students
Home or with family/nanny or au pair	122	33.1%
Tower Day School	44	11.9%
The Bethlehem Schools	42	11.4%
Bridge to Learning/Bridge to Learning Too	41	11.1%
Another Provider	39	10.6%
Magical Beginnings- Wakefield	17	4.6%
Lynnfield Public Schools Preschool	15	4.1%
Lynnfield Children Center	10	2.7%
Our Lady of Assumption	9	2.4%
Goddard School - Reading/Saugus	8	2.2%
Little Treasures School House	5	1.4%
Odyssey Day School	5	1.4%
Magical Beginnings- Lynnfield	4	1.1%
Jewish Community Center - Peabody	3	0.8%
Magical Beginnings- Peabody	2	0.5%
YMCA - Torigian	2	0.5%
Shining Stars	1	0.3%
Total Reported by Residents	**369**	**100%**

When the family survey data is compiled based on the potential year of entry for kindergarten, the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years have the largest number of potential students.   Figure 3 depicts the results of the family survey data.

Figure 3
Potential Number of Kindergarten Students by Kindergarten Class as Reported from Family Survey

School Year	Potential Students
2018-2019	33
2019-2020	100
2020-2021	99
2021-2022	73
2022-2023	52
2023-2024	48

Provider Survey

A list of local child care providers was compiled from local families through the personal networks of Committee members and posting on local Facebook pages. Each of the child care providers was contacted by email or phone to request that the information be provided on behalf of the Lynnfield Enrollment and Capacity Exploration Committee and informed:
- The information was being provided to the Committee.
- The only information being requested is the number of potential Lynnfield kindergartners by age OR year they would enter the Lynnfield school system as kindergartners.
- No personal information.

Although all child care providers were contacted more than once, a number of providers did not submit data including:

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- Goddard School – Middleton, Reading, and Saugus
- Jewish Community Center
- Little Treasures School House
- Next Generation – Beverly
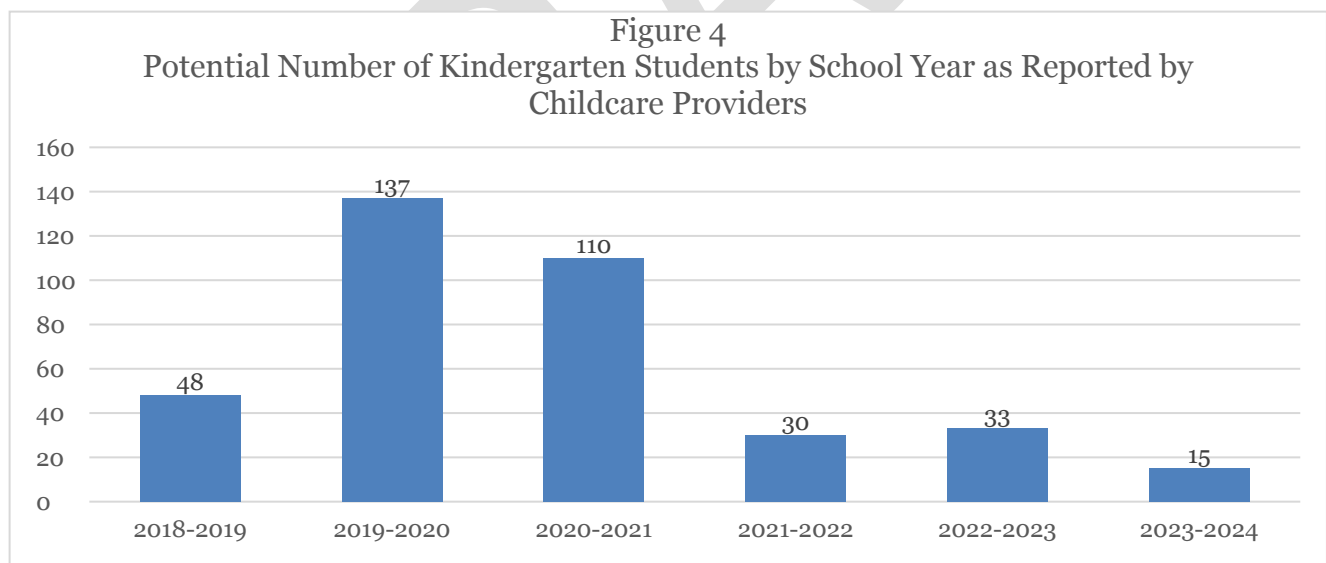- Shining Stars
- Tower Day School

Table 2 shows the total number of students at each provider that were reported as living

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in Lynnfield.

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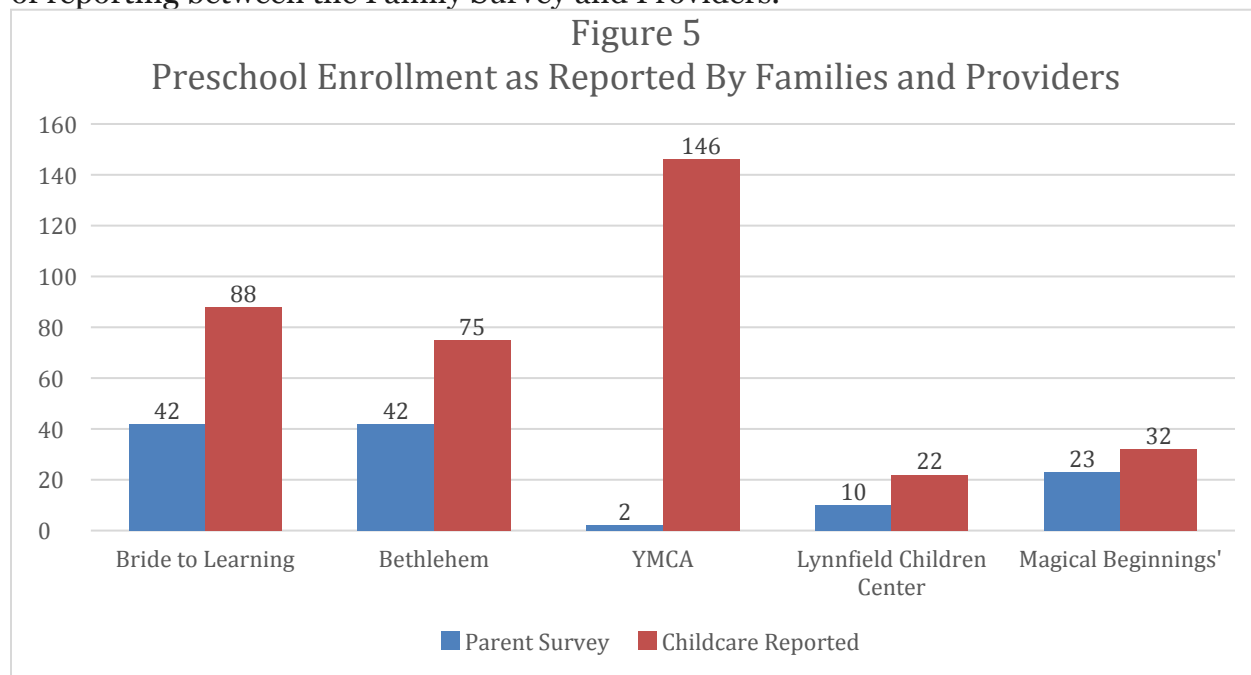
Table 2
Child Care Provider Survey Responses

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Reporting Early Learning and Childcare Center	Students Reported
Bridge to Learning/Bridge to Learning Too	88
Lynnfield Children Center	22
Magical Beginnings – Peabody	1
Magical Beginnings – River Street	7
Magical Beginnings – Wakefield	24
Odyssey Day School	9
Our Lady of Assumption	1
The Bethlehem School (Data reported was estimated)	75
YMCA	146
Total potential Lynnfield students reported	**373**

Figure 4 reflects a projection of potential students as reported by those childcare providers that responded to the request for information by kindergarten class.

Figure 4
Potential Number of Kindergarten Students by School Year as Reported by Childcare Providers

In reviewing the information provided by the Family Survey and the childcare - providers, significant underreporting of potential students appears.
The Bethlehem School estimated a total of 75 Lynnfield student in their care starting at age 3. In contrast, the family survey totaled 42 for the same potential school years who parents reported attend the Bethlehem School. The Bridge to Learning/Bridge to Learning Too reported 88 potential Lynnfield kindergarteners, while the family survey

only garnered 42 students attending these two care centers. Figure 5 shows the disparity of reporting between the Family Survey and Providers.

Figure 5
Preschool Enrollment as Reported By Families and Providers

Provider	Parent Survey	Childcare Reported
Bride to Learning	42	88
Bethlehem	42	75
YMCA	2	146
Lynnfield Children Center	10	22
Magical Beginnings'	23	32

Data Limitations
The methodology was executed with fidelity, but by the nature of this rapid data collection approach, there are limitations to the potential accuracy of the data and resulting analysis.

First, not all the providers responded to the request for information from the committee and clearly the provider data included a much larger number of prospective students. It is important to note, further, that though it is believed the list of providers is comprehensive, some may have been missed.

Second, it is clear that the family survey response, though high, likely does not include many families, especially those without a connection to the school district (through school-aged siblings), the community, or Facebook (or social media in general). When comparing the data from participating providers versus the data reported by families, we clearly see an underreporting of children by families – an indication that the potential pipeline of students is much larger than revealed in this study. Additionally, anecdotal data as well as potential plans for development indicate that there may be more families with young children entering Lynnfield in the near future.

Third, the data is not geographically based. That is, though we can get a sense of total enrollment, we have no sense of the location of the enrollment. For example, in a given year, student enrollment may be half in the feeder pattern for the Huckleberry School and half for the Summer Street School. Alternatively, it could be 80% Huckleberry
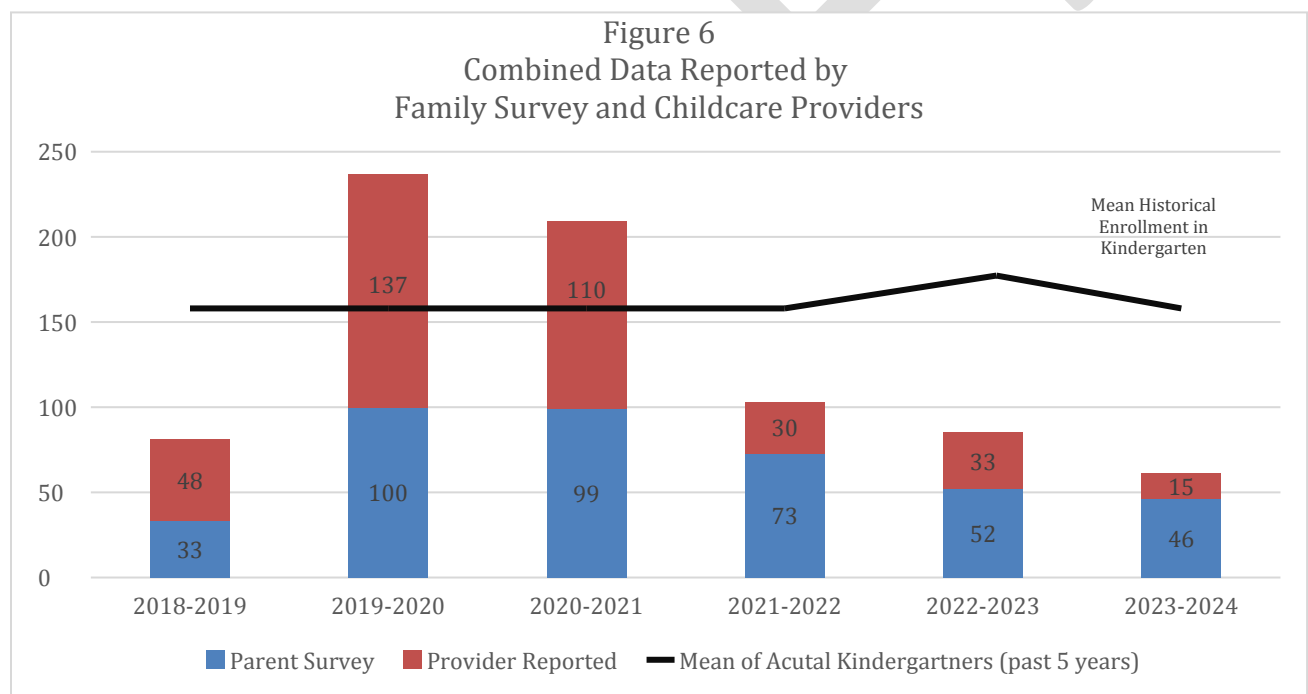
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School and only 20% Summer Street School students. Without geographic knowledge, the potential disconnect in feeder patterns is not known.

Fourth, without historical data on preschool enrollment it is difficult to know if the trends observed are anomalies or part of larger enrollment changes. In the future, the Town of Lynnfield should collect data on preschool enrollment to build a more robust database for planning. Though data collected using this methodology will always have unexpected variations and anomalies, additional data collected over time will help mitigate some degree of uncertainty.

Analysis

Figure 6 shows the cumulative data reported by families and providers for each class of kindergarteners for the period studied. Family data reporting children attending providers that also participated in the survey were removed to prevent "double-counting." Further Figure 6 indicates the mean actual Kindergarten enrollment for the past five years as a reference point.

Figure 6
Combined Data Reported by
Family Survey and Childcare Providers

As mentioned in the previous section, these data are likely a conservative estimate, reflecting a lower number than will actually be enrolled for the given year. Even without accounting for this underestimation, the anticipated kindergarteners from the data collected for the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 are very likely to exceed recent historical levels.

However, a question remains about the subsequent classes, starting with 2021-22. The data appear to show enrollment dropping substantially. However, it is very likely this is

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function of under reporting as described in the Data Limitations section above. The question remains as to how low the forecast from the 2021-22 to 2023-24 school years is and whether the high potential enrollment in 2019-20 and 2020-21 are anomalies or a reflection of the size of future classes.

Summary and Conclusion

The Civitas team has been honored to assist the Committee in evaluating the possible class size of the incoming kindergarten class over the next five years. The call for the collection of this data allowed the committee to gather information that had been unavailable prior to the inception of the committee. The collection of the data, although imperfect, gives a perspective to measure the anticipated kindergarten class size against the school district's actual historic data.

The next few years can see the expansion of housing within in the Town of Lynnfield and the current residents in this thriving community can expect the size of the school district to see an increase in students. In concentrating on the potential size of the kindergarten class, data was collected to focus a lens on the expectation for resources and physical space to prepare for the potential increase in capacity.

An effort was made to gather information from potential childcare and early learning centers of the children of the Lynnfield community. A list of those potential childcare and early learning centers was compiled by committee members who have insight in the arena. When reviewing the list and those childcare and early learning centers that responded and those who did not, it can be concluded that there are significant number of childcare providers feeding into the community. Many of those childcare providers are in surrounding communities and brings to light the concern that the list was not comprehensive. In considering the childcare and early learning centers that did not respond and the potential for childcare and early learning centers omitted from the list the likelihood of a potential number of kindergartens not reported is great The conclusion is an underreporting of students and the potential for larger class sizes than reflected from the data collected.

The family survey was able to reach 375 families in the community, 282 with students in the school district. The distribution of the survey included an email from the superintendent of schools to families in the school district. The survey has the potential to overlook families that have children under the age of 5 and have not entered the Lynnfield school system. As we are looking to gather information of those such children it contributes to the theory that the data collected for potential class size from the family survey is underreporting students.

Despite evidence of underreporting, the data collected show the potential growth of the community and the size of the incoming classes has the potential to exceed the trend of an average class of 158 kindergartners over the past five years as reported by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The data collected is indicating the incoming kindergarten class of 2019-2020 has the potential to exceed

200 students as does the class of 2020-2021. Future trends are unclear based on the insufficiency of the existing data.

Acknowledgements

Civitas Strategies would like to acknowledge the many community members that contributed to the success of this assessment.

Thank you to the members of the School Enrollment and Capacity Exploration Committee: John Scena, Chair, Christopher Barrett, Robert Dolan, Tim Doyle, Robert Priestly, Finance Committee, Kathyrn Price, Gary Romano, Arthur Swanson, Jane Tremblay, and John Tomasz

Thank you to all the families that assisted in this process, from creating and distributing the survey, answering the survey, facilitating relationships with childcare providers and early learning centers, garnering community support and adding insight.

Thank you to Kathryn Price who has been instrumental from the inception of this evaluation including facilitating numerous introductions to child care providers and early learning centers; Crystal Bates, Joseph Bates, Karen O'Brien, Timothy Price, and Gary Romano for their assistance in beta testing the survey so it was well executed and functioned as anticipated.

About Civitas Strategies

At Civitas Strategies, our mission is to help children and families by helping public-serving organizations grow through strategy design, talent management, and program evaluation. One of the ways we do this is by helping organizations that are interested in advancing early learning for young children (birth to age eight). Our broad base of early learning clients includes large and small foundations, educational institutes, and early childhood support agencies. We have had the opportunity to enable each of them by refining their strategy and sustaining their impact thereby deepening their effect on our youth.

Civitas Strategies' ten-year goal is to help our clients improve the lives of 1 million children and families. We are already 93% of the way towards reaching this goal. Our clients do the truly noble work, in the trenches, with children and families. As an organization, we commit to serve our clients with the highest quality customer service. In addition, we are equally dedicated to our pro bono projects, carbon neutral operations, and our corporate giving program, which total over 15% of our annual net profit.

Alison LaRocca, Engagement Manager, is an experienced education and management consultant professional who partners with public serving organizations to help them better understand and grow their impact. She is the co-author of the book Lean Recruitment, which aims to support nonprofit leaders as they cost-effectively

attract and engage top talent. Alison is a graduate of Williams College and holds a Masters in Elementary Education from Merrimack College, and is a recipient of the Kenneth E. Pickard Municipal Innovation Award. She is also a passionate advocate for the arts, especially dance as she leads the Albany Berkshire Ballet as President of its Board of Directors into a new era of innovation and impact across the Northeast.

Stacey Dailey Roussin, Consultant, is experienced in nonprofit governance and fundraising as well as private financial management and accounting. She has supported multiple nonprofit organizations in multiple capacities, including serving as a member of the Board for the Albany Berkshire Ballet. Ms. Dailey Roussin has participated in raising tens of thousands of dollars for health, community, and national nonprofits, and committed to continuing her efforts in the future. Ms. Dailey Roussin started her career in the field of accounting and finance working for a number of companies including Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company and TransWorld Entertainment. She holds a Bachelor's in Accounting and Computer Science from Russell Sage College