



# **Access to Quality Child Care (AQC) and Healthy Eating/Active Living (HEAL)**

**Highlights from the 2019-2020 Evaluation Report**





## BACKGROUND

The Buck Family Fund of the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) funds two integrated initiatives led by the Marin Child Care Council (MC3): The Access to Quality Child Care (AQC) [initiative](#), launched in 2015, and the Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) initiative, launched in May of 2016. Together, AQC/HEAL supports social and economic self-sufficiency among underserved families in Marin County by addressing inequities in access to child care and improving quality in early care and education. Strategies used by AQC/HEAL include:

- Increasing subsidized child care vouchers and access to quality child care.
- Engaging parents in educational workshops, access to community resources and policy advocacy efforts.
- Providing a diverse set of supports to child care providers to improve the quality of care.
- Improving food and physical activity environments in early care settings.

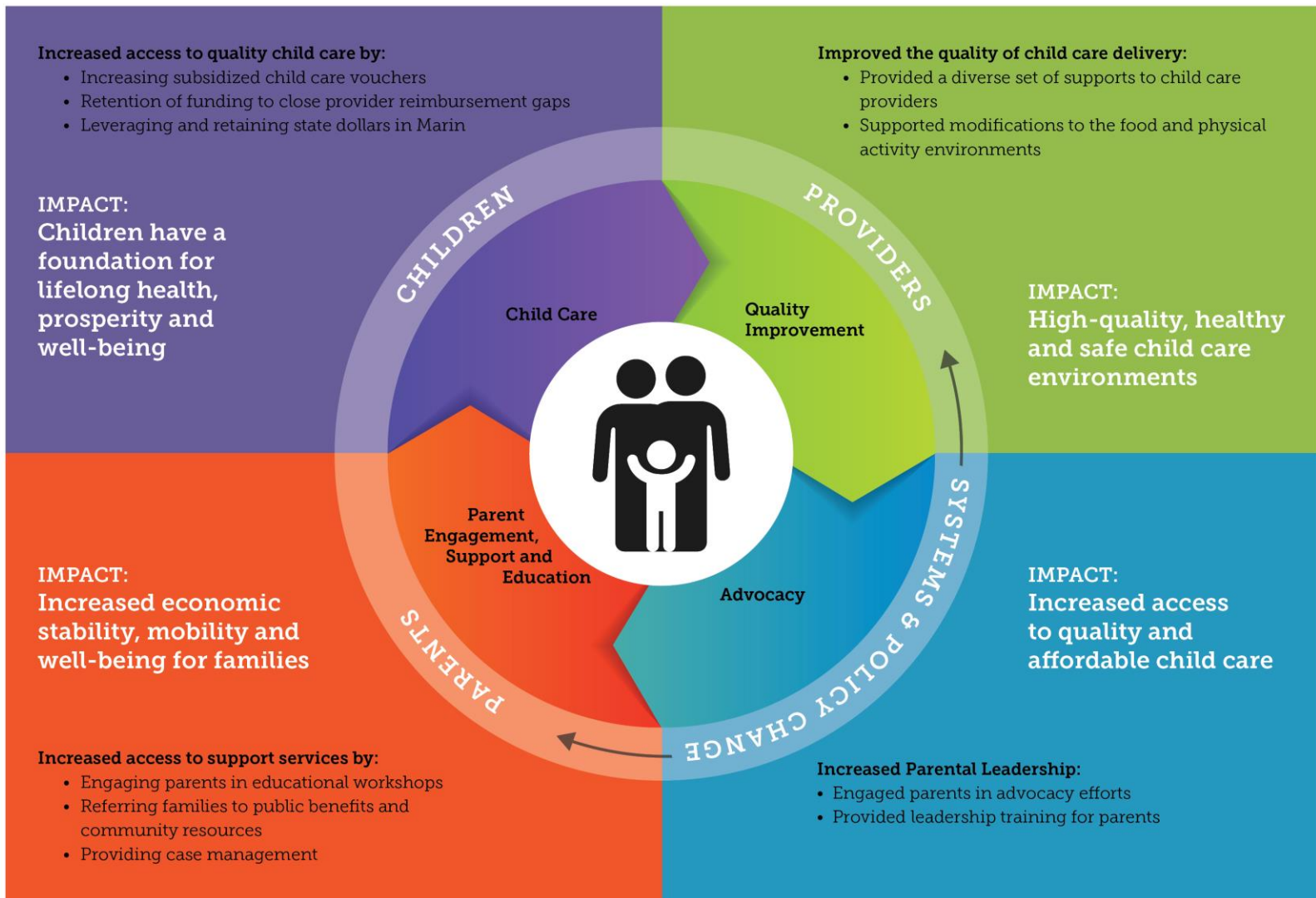
This document includes highlights from AQC/HEAL's 2019-2020 Evaluation Report. Findings from the report were informed by program data, MCF staff, AQC/HEAL providers, and participating parents. The report includes the initiative's strategies and impacts prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, explores shifting needs of families and providers during the pandemic, and the initiative's response to those needs.

The following page includes a visual of the Initiative's efforts as it applies to four areas of impact. **This report is sectioned by: 1) children/parents, 2) providers, and 3) systems & policy change.**



## Access to Quality Child Care (AQC)—Healthy Eating/Active Living (HEAL)

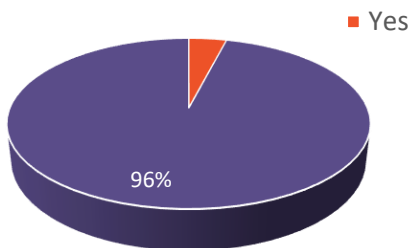
AQC/HEAL supports social well-being and economic mobility, choice and agency among underserved families in Marin County by addressing inequities in access to child care and improving quality in early care and education



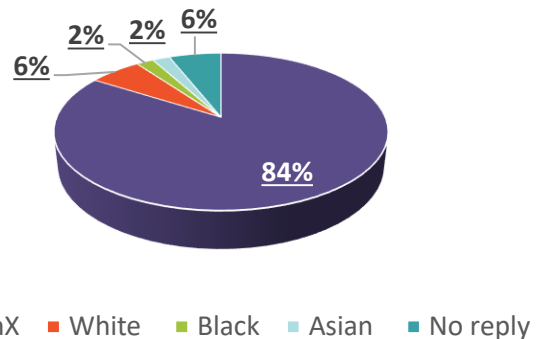


# Children & Parents About the Families

Parent with College Degree

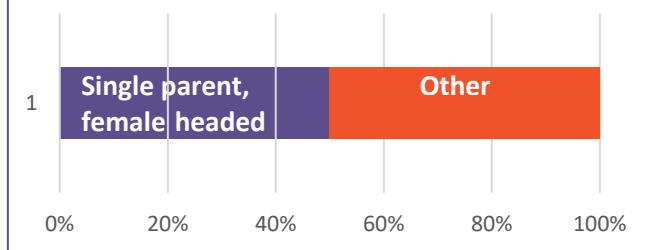


Race/Ethnicity

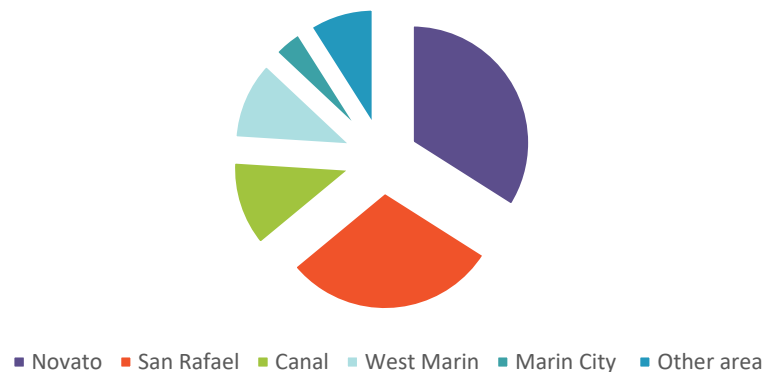


{ 81 families with 99 children aged 0-4 were served. }

Household Type



Where Families Lived



96% Employed

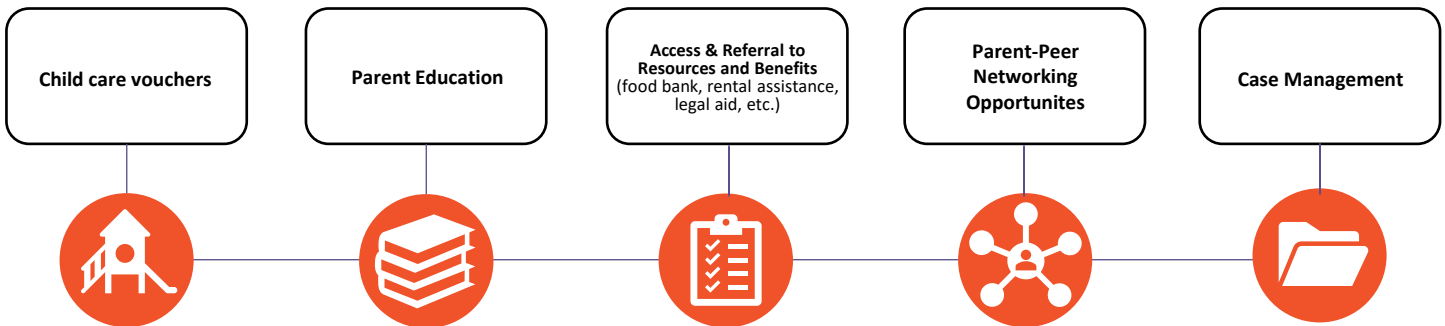


Median Family Income at  
Enrollment=\$46,960.



# Children & Parents

## What Was Offered



## What Changed

- Among families certified for AQC/HEAL enrollment in FY 2019-2020, median family annual income was \$48,338, compared to \$38,137 in the year of enrollment. Consistent with findings in FY 2018-2019, **families who participated in AQC/HEAL for more time experienced the largest median increase in income.**
- Qualitative evidence indicates AQC/HEAL provided some families the opportunity to complete their degrees. One parent stated, “thanks to this program, our family was able to move ahead financially, be less stressed out, and I could attain my degree.”
- MC3 reported that parent workshops led to improvements in healthy food offerings at home and literacy practices.
- Parents and providers reported that more families were supporting their child’s development by using healthy eating and active living practices learned from MC3. One provider noted, “Parents would mention to me that they just went to the class at MC3, and [say] ‘we’ve done this at home.’ They mention it, and you notice that the lunch of the children is already different – vegetables, more fruits, less junk food. That’s very beneficial for the parents and families.”

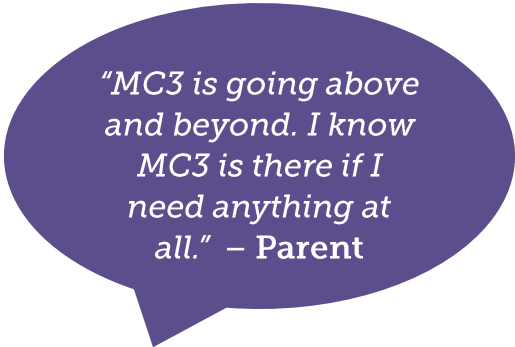




# Children & Parents

## Response to COVID-19

- ✓ **Information about COVID-19:** *Child care, the pandemic, and referrals to other resources.*
- ✓ **Access to child care:** *Emergency pop-up child care to families with essential workers.*
- ✓ **Setting up remote learning/technological barriers:** *Tablets for parents, spaces for tutoring, internet access, and tech support.*
- ✓ **Monetary assistance for basic needs:** *Cash aid to over 200 parents.*
- ✓ **Access to healthy foods:** *MC3 partnered with SF-Marin Food Bank to create a drive through food pantry.*
- ✓ **Emotional support:** *MC3 case managers offered ongoing emotional support to children and parents.*
- ✓ **Parenting support and learning opportunities:** *Virtual workshops and classes for parents and MC3 distributed 38 educational activity kits for children.*



*"MC3 is going above and beyond. I know MC3 is there if I need anything at all." – Parent*

### The trend of average increased income for AQC/HEAL families was disrupted by COVID-19 in FY 2020-2021.

Among 61 families who were certified in June 2020 (after the beginning of the pandemic), median income change was significantly lower in FY 2020-2021 than in the prior fiscal year. In particular, families who first enrolled in FY 2018-2019 or 2019-2020 saw a median decrease in income of 20-25% by FY 2020-2021.



# Providers

## About The Providers



AQC worked with approximately **28 child care providers** in FY 2019-20, including **11 child care centers** and **17 family child care homes**.



## What Was Offered



To incentivize participation in AQC/HEAL, providers received a stipend for each AQC/HEAL child aged 0-4 who enrolled at their site. These stipends helped to compensate providers for their time working with their coach to improve the quality of their program. On average, providers received \$1,000 annually for each child enrolled in AQC/HEAL.



AQC provider supports during FY 2019-2020 included 318 one-on-one TA coaching sessions, quality assessments and observations, and opportunities for providers to meet and share learnings. AQC coaching also offers connections to continued learning and trainings, particularly around topics like behavioral redirection and parent communication.



Of the 28 AQC sites, 26 also participated in HEAL and received additional coaching and support to make Policy, Systems, and/or Environmental changes to promote good nutrition and physical activity within the child care setting. HEAL awarded 42 mini-grants to the 26 participating providers totaling \$161,347 in site improvement funds.



HEAL also offered 288 one-on-one coaching sessions to help providers learn about the benefits of healthier environments and best practices for making necessary improvements.

**28**  
**Providers**



**\$48,400**  
(total in stipends)



# Providers

## What Changed

- Because of AQC support, providers changed the way they interacted with children and how they engaged families. One provider stated, *"I have learned to have a curriculum, to have a daily activity with the children..."*
- Providers updated handbooks with information about nutrition, illness, discipline, and toileting practices.
- Providers began establishing monthly and annual budgeting practices.
- Eleven sites made a total of **20 policy changes** through HEAL. Policies included adding breastfeeding space, healthy celebrations, family-style eating, and garden-based education.
- **34 HEAL sites** adopted environmental changes like building outdoor play structures or creating indoor cooling areas.

*"AQC/HEAL has changed the entire way my child care runs. There are benefits to having all of this new knowledge and this language that I can use with the children."*  
– Provider

## Response to COVID-19

AQC/HEAL's child care quality efforts helped providers navigate the pandemic to continue supporting children and families. As one MC3 staff person shared, *"There's no rule book for COVID, but the quality work is already embedded into [providers'] programs and that has a huge benefit for the children."*

Pre-existing supports served as a crucial bedrock for providers. MC3 demonstrated incredible versatility in adapting its provider services to expand on these supports, by providing:

- **Information about COVID-19:** Call center and virtual coaching sessions were available to providers. Updates about health and safety protocols were also provided online and via email
- **Emergency supplies and funding:** Included MC3 helping provider sites acquire cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE). MC3 also hosted three supply pick-up drive-through events for providers to get free items such as face coverings and hand sanitizers.
- **Virtual trainings:** Provided a five-week series of workshops to help providers with policies, procedures, and day to day operations during the pandemic.
- **Healthy eating active living resources:** Included delivery of local produce, HEAL-focused activity kits, online classes and one-on-one check ins.
- **Space modifications:** Awarded 20 additional mini-grants to include changes to built environments—such as, more handwashing stations, outdoor play divisions, and sneeze guards.
- **Trauma-informed tools and emotional support:** Hosted four-part series on trauma-informed care in Spanish and English. MC3 staff also stepped out of their assigned roles to offer emotional support to providers.





# Systems & Policy Change

## What Was Offered

Beyond the benefits that families gain by connecting with providers and MC3 staff, the parent-led and parent-run grassroots program offers additional information and supports. MC3 hosts monthly meetings for Marin County's local chapter of Parent Voices (PV), a statewide network of parent-led groups advocating for affordable access to quality child care. Through monthly meetings, parents can gain leadership skills, receive advocacy training, and build relationships with other members of their community. As one MC3 staff person explained, *"For almost 20 years now, Parent Voices has worked to preserve [child care] services when there has been a threat to funding and to make services less burdensome to parents. They've been successful in that and they're also involved in supporting tax initiatives for funding child care."*

## Steps Taken Toward Change

In FY 2019-2020 PV parents engaged in numerous activities to advocate for increased access to and funding for child care. These included:

- Participating in conversations for the United Parent Leaders Action Network national gathering. The gathering was an opportunity for parent leaders to engage with their peers from across the country, learn about key issues, and create plans to advance policies that will benefit children and families.
- Contributing to California focus groups and roundtables on improving access to high-quality child care.
- Organizing with 50 partner organization to march on the State Capitol for the Child Care & End Child Poverty in California advocacy day, which highlighted the role of child care in lifting families out of poverty and existing unmet child care needs in the state.
- Submitting public comments during state budget hearings to protect current child care dollars and prevent a 10% reduction on subsidized providers' rates.

Other notable outcomes achieved through PV advocacy efforts included press coverage in publications such as the Mercury News, New York Times, and Marin Independent Journal; and connecting with elected officials about additional child care voucher funding. Importantly, parents also gained personal benefits from their participation in advocacy such as shared emotional support and improved navigation of government resources and benefits.



# Systems & Policy Change

## Key Recommendations

### Key recommendations to build a high quality, equitable, and sustainable early childhood care and education system:

- Support Parent Voices to increase its advocacy impact.
- Support efforts to organize child care providers to create a strong network that includes peer learning to help build relationships and share resources. This network would have the potential to work on advocacy issues, such as improving compensation and working conditions within the child care sector
- Continue to build public will around the importance of local, sustainable revenue source for child care in Marin County.
- MCF should continue to fund MC3 to implement AQC/HEAL. In light of COVID-19's protracted impact on child care, MCF should also consider increasing their investments in AQC/HEAL's child care vouchers to serve more families with young children in Marin County.